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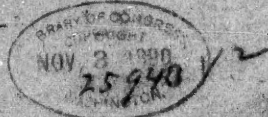
MILDRED KENT'S HERO.

BY

HATTIE E. COLTER,

Author of "Medoline Selwyn's Work."

"Hold the faith and fight the fight,
After darkness cometh light:
Unto those who bear the test,
Lo! He giveth perfect rest."



BOSTON:
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CHAPTER I.

FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL.

TWO young girls were standing apart, talking very earnestly together, on the playground of a very select private school. "She is a pretty little thing," one of them was saying, "and seems to have been well trained."

"I don't care if she is; no girl wearing such a frock and boots should have the impudence to come here. What is the use of having a private school and paying such lots of money if beggars are allowed to attend?"

"It is cruel, Helen, to call her a beggar; besides her clothes are neat and clean. I have been having such a nice time all by myself looking at her trim little figure and costume. I assure you it is quite

a study — at least it must have been to the one who thought it out and put it together so gracefully."

"You are the queerest girl, Magdalene, I ever knew; if your father weren't so awfully rich I should leave you severely alone."

"I do not care for such friendship if that is why you are so friendly with me." A stern look came into the usually gentle face, which her companion hastened to dispel. "I was only joking; if your boots were patched like that new comer's I should still love you."

Magdalene looked a little doubtful. "I am glad I am not forced to wear patched boots; but if I had I am afraid you would get some other girl for particular friend."

They passed out of hearing of the little girl who that morning had come with some fear but a great deal of delightful anticipation to school, the first she had ever attended. Only a year before her father had died, after months of sickness caused by a blow on the chest from a case they were hoisting at the store where he was clerk. Then while her mother was learning a trade whereby to earn a living for her children, Mildred, only a child herself, took charge of the younger ones, becoming a sort of little mother to Paul and Gracie. Long ago, before the sad days

had come, when the father was well and the mother only had her pretty, cosy home to keep in order and her little ones to care for; she had taken special care with Mildred's education. To keep her from evil influences she had taught her at home; so that now, at twelve, the poor child had her first experiences of school life. She had started out that morning with such shy eagerness; she had thought of it by day and dreamed of it at night, wondering if the first of September would ever come; while her mother had tried so hard to get her dressed suitably, and the efforts, according to Mildred's ideas, had been crowned with such perfect success, she had felt herself well enough dressed to call on the President at the White House as she walked down the quiet street from their cottage to the crowded thoroughfare that led to the school-house. Paul and Gracie had stood at the gate watching her, while mother glanced up from her work with a happy feeling in her heart as she watched her daughter starting out with the busier currents of life. She was willing to take a good many extra stitches in order that her daughter might be preserved from the rude companionship of a public school. She seemed, in spite of their poverty, so dainty and flower-like, the mother longed to preserve this characteristic of her first-born. The

school-room reached, Mildred's courage began to depart with uncomfortable speed. Scattered in groups about the grounds were such handsomely dressed boys and girls, that her own clothes, which had seemed so excellent, suddenly became shabby; but worse than all were the words she had just overheard from two of her school-mates. Fortunately the school bell soon rang, and after a while Mildred became so interested in the lessons, the pain at her heart was somewhat deadened. But when the luncheon bell rang and the other children trooped out to enjoy their lunch and games under the trees, she remained at her desk swallowing her bread and butter and a few tears at the same time.

As the hour for final closing drew near she thought, with an intensity of pain which only a child's uncalloused heart can feel, if she could only in some way escape the prying eyes of the whole school, how happy she would be. Those wretched patches on the little boots that no amount of blacking would conceal were the most trying things to bear. At last the dreadful moment came when she had to take her place with the rest and march out of the school-room. Once outside, her agony was intensified; for the girls stood in groups apparently waiting for her.

"I wonder if her mother is a washerwoman?" "Let's count the patches on her boots." "The impudence of such people sending their children here," were some of the remarks that greeted her. She scarce knew if she were walking or standing still; and while she tried to hurry, why was it that she heard so much? Would the gate never be reached? A cloud gathered over her eyes and she felt herself swaying, when a gracious voice called back her dazed senses, and she saw one of the larger boys at her side, while he said: "You look tired, little one; let me take your satchel." She glanced up into his face, and the lad was startled at the grieved, haunted expression of the child's face.

"You must not mind what those silly girls say; they generally treat new-comers shabbily."

"But it is my clothes, and not myself that they are angry about."

"Well, so much the better; your clothes are not really you."

"I know that; but I cannot get any others for a long while; and I must come to school, for my mother has paid for me."

"Who is your mother?"

"Mrs. Kent, on Mulberry street."

"Does she earn her own living?"

"Yes, she is a dressmaker now. I took care of Paul and Grace while she was learning. Our father is dead."

"You have been to school before — have you not?"

"No, never until to-day. I thought I should be so happy." A little sob escaped the brave lips so used to shutting in their pain.

"I do not think they will say any more rude things to you after I shall have given them a piece of my mind."

Mildred gave him such a look of gratitude that the lad felt something like a lump coming into his own throat. Then her face grew sad again. "Will they mind what you say?"

"Well, yes, they always do when I get in earnest. I don't usually have much to say to them."

Again she looked at him with a scrutinizing air, not quite so agreeable as her former admiring regard.

"I suppose it is because you are so large and" — she paused a few seconds and then added, — "so good-looking."

He flushed, but said with a smile: "It is because they like to have us notice them, my mother and I. They hope to get invited to Grassmere."

"You are one of those good people such as I have read about in stories, who do brave things and take the part of the poor and weak."

Her look of admiration deepened into one of awe; to come in direct contact with one of those beautiful beings out of a story-book thrilled the child's imaginative soul.

"What a queer little kitten you are!" The boy's face flushed more deeply. He did not enjoy quite so much hero worship, and turned her remark jestingly.

"I expect I am," she said with such a pathetic little nod that he grew more uncomfortable still.

"I must leave you now," he said abruptly. They had got on to another street, and the other school-children had drifted pretty well out of sight. He gave back her satchel, saying: "Don't come quite so early to school to-morrow. And you need not give yourself any more anxiety about those girls; they will any of them be glad to make friends with you."

She looked wistfully at him with much the same expression in her eyes as he had sometimes seen in the face of his own beautiful spaniel when he had felt it incumbent on him to punish her for some imaginary fault.

CHAPTER II.

BETH AND CONNIE.

MILDRED walked home slowly, and in her childish way reasoned the matter out. She concluded it would only grieve her mother to know that the school-mates were mostly hostile, and she had cares enough already without any additional ones. "I will tell her the lessons were just lovely, and may be she won't ask any more questions." After she had decided on this course, she walked along more cheerfully; for one added drop of bitterness would be the pain her mother would feel over her treatment by the school-mates. The children were still at the gate watching for her.

"Have you been here ever since?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, no, we had our dinners in the house. Tell us all about it."

"I have not much to tell. It is just a lot of boys and girls; and they read and study and play."

"Did you play?" Paul asked eagerly.

"No, but maybe I will some day."

"I would play every day," Paul said with much assurance.

The mother came to the door to meet her. "Did you have a happy day at school, Mildred?" she asked.

"The lessons were lovely. It is so nice to just sit still and study with no one talking around you."

"Like me and Grace," Paul interjected.

The mother noticed the pale face and sorrowful expression, and guessed that all the experiences had not been alike lovely with the lessons.

"You may play a while with the children," she said, returning again to her work, a good deal heavier hearted than she had been during the day. Mildred took very little supper, and her mother discovered that her lunch had scarcely been touched. Now that it was too late she regretted having sent her child to such a school. The careless good humor

and comradeship of a public school might in the end have been the best. However, she resolved to let Mildred try one day more. Children's hearts are not so brittle as to break at a little hard usage, and possibly it might be the best training for her, since she must soon or late fight the battle that every breadwinner must face. The next morning Mildred was in no hurry to start for school, and then loitered along the way, barely escaping a tardy mark. When the luncheon bell rang, the very girl whose sharp tongue had given her the first stab came to her side and said graciously:—

"We take our lunch under the trees. You can eat yours with the rest of us, and then join with us in our games."

"I think I would rather stay here," Mildred faltered. It was nearly as trying to go right in among them as to stand outside and listen to their criticisms.

"Very well, you can suit yourself."

A moment after Mildred heard her tell the lad who had come to her rescue the day before that she had invited her to join them.

"She won't come with us; I believe she is a sulky little thing."

"She would be an angel to be friends immediately with your crowd," was the low spoken answer, sternly uttered.

"Well, you can't blame me, I have done my best," she said, defensively.

"And your worst too." They passed out of hearing, and Mildred nibbled her bread and butter and conned her lessons over again.

The moments were dragging on heavily, the day already seemed as long as a week at home; but presently her pulses were set beating tumultuously as two of her schoolmates seated themselves beside her and opened up a conversation.

"Where do you live?" was the first question.

"No. 6 Mulberry Street."

"What does your father do?"

"He is dead" was the reply, spoken solemnly.

"What?"

"He is dead, Anna; don't ask any more about him," one of them said.

There was silence for a few moments; even these worldly damsels were a trifle awed at mention of the dead.

"Well, who earns your living?" was the next question.

"My mother gets a good deal of money making

dresses, and my grandmother sends the rest from England."

"Oh, then you *have* a grandmother?"

"Why, don't everybody have one?"

"Well, no; not grandmothers with money; your case is not quite so bad as we expected."

"Do you always have plenty to eat?" the other girl asked.

Mildred's face crimsoned, and then she sobbed out, having lost her self control: "You are dreadful."

There was a sudden interruption which prevented further conversation from them.

"See here, you girls; if I catch you at this work again you may expect an invitation to Boston just as much as to Grassmere."

"Oh, here is Douglass. I thought you were down the street," one of Mildred's tormentors exclaimed ruefully.

"That is how you came to torment this poor child. Now if I hear another word from any one of you I shall make complaint to my mother, and she will do the same to the Principal, and that pupil will leave this school directly. My mother is the heaviest stock-holder here, and she will not maintain an institution that permits cruelty to

children." He seemed no longer a lad, but a man, with all a man's strength and passion at sight of wrong and oppression. The girls went out quickly and much more humbly than they entered. Douglass turned to Mildred.

"I have been listening out there, and I thought they had gone far enough. Never answer any of their questions." He turned and walked out, but presently coming back, said:

"You must not stay all day in this close school-room. Come out with me."

She arose obediently. Very probably if he had ordered her to go around and shake hands with all the school-children, or any other trying ordeal within reach of her powers, she would have done as commanded.

"Why do you take my part?" she asked, as they stood in the doorway surveying the merry groups scattered over the playground.

"I do not like to be questioned. Besides it is not polite to ask questions. Now look over there by the fence; there are two little girls smaller than you are. I have been looking around for playfellows for you, and I have concluded they are as good as we can find in this crowd."

Mildred followed silently, not daring to speak lest her conversation might end in a question.

"See here, Beth and Connie, you are to play with Mildred Kent," Douglass said authoritatively, when he reached them. "If you get on well and she tells me on Friday night that you have been kind, you shall come to Grassmere on Saturday and shall have swings and a sail on the lake."

"Oh, we will be as good as possible to her," they responded joyfully, shabby dress and patched boots quite forgotten for the time. He left them then, Mildred's eyes following him wistfully; then she turned to her companions who scarce knew how to make advances lest they might forfeit the reward.

"What makes him so good to me?" In her eagerness to solve the mystery she forgot that he had just told her questions were not polite.

"He always takes the side of lame dogs and poor kittens and things," Connie replied, half frightened at her answer as soon as it was spoken.

"But Mildred is not dogs and kittens," Beth said, reprovingly. "You are a very thoughtless little girl, Connie; if you say such things we won't get to Grassmere and have the boat-sail. Just think how we have wanted to go there ever so long, and our mothers want to go, too."

"Never mind, Beth; I know what Connie meant, and I won't keep you from Grassmere."

"Are n't you coming too?" Connie asked.

"I do not think he invited me, and anyway I have no good clothes."

"Are you very poor?"

"I expect so. I never thought about it till yesterday."

"We are all rich people who come to this school; that is why the girls are so cross with you," Connie remarked complacently.

"Connie D. Smythe, if you do not hush I am sure Mildred will tell Douglass how you talk. I would, I know, if I was in her place."

"I don't care," Connie said recklessly. "What can we talk about, anyway."

"I will tell you stories about the children and their dolls, Ermengarde and Lucinda," Mildred suggested.

"Very well," Beth responded, with an air of resignation.

"Why can't we play tag," Connie asked. "We were playing that when you and Douglass came up."

"I would rather do that than tell stories."

"Can you really tell stories?" Beth asked with awakening interest.

"I make a great many for the children."

"We will let you make them for us wet days when we can't play out here," Connie said graciously.

Mildred's laugh was ringing out quite joyously when the bell rang, and her satisfaction was not lessened as she overheard Beth and Connie talking to themselves.

"She is a grand girl to play with, she lets you cheat her so well," Connie said with considerable elation.

"Yes, and if she is poor, she is far nicer than some of the very richest girls, for she don't expect you to do as she says all the time. For my part I am beginning to like poor people the best," Beth responded, with a good deal of decision.

The afternoon sped by very quickly to Mildred. At the school-room door her new friends were waiting for her; with one on either side she got on to the street very comfortably.

"Maybe we will come and see you some day," Connie remarked graciously.

"Some rainy afternoon, and you can tell us stories," Beth suggested.

"A fine day would be nicer, we could sit in our

playhouse. I make believe a great many things there with the children. I have been their mother this long time, and my husband's at sea; they like that far better than to have him away among the angels, — that seems so lonesome."

"Do you really make believe the same thing for days and days?"

"Yes, the children talk about their sailor father now more than their real one. He is going to bring them lots of things some day; that's what I made him for."

Mildred spoke with the matronly dignity of a veritable wife. With her new friends such a mingling of the real and the ideal was extremely fascinating.

"Connie, let us plan to go the Saturday after next; we will stay to tea and bring our lunch-baskets full of cake and things. Her mother won't mind the bother of us then."

"Are you sisters?" Mildred asked.

"No, but we live on the same street. We'll be make-believe sisters," Connie shouted enthusiastically.

"Will your mothers let you come?"

"They won't know anything about it. They are always making calls or receiving. Anyway, I guess we are mostly in their way out of school."

"But it won't be right to bring your tea with you unless you ask leave."

"You silly child, cook gives us things whenever we want them. She is glad to get rid of us, too. We seem in 'most everybody's way."

"Then in some things you are poorer than I am. I never remember being in my mother's way," Mildred said, with a good deal of sympathy.

"Oh well, folks don't mind being poor unless they are short of money. They don't reckon anything else poverty," Connie said, as if she were perfectly well versed in such limitations.

"I had rather be short of money than of mother's love. It's just beautiful to be with my mother. Why I have shed cupfuls of tears thinking if she were to die."

"I don't think we could shed a cupful between us, Beth, do you, if our mothers were both dead?" Connie asked with all seriousness.

"I don't know. I have never lost any tears thinking about it," Beth said indifferently.

They said good bye, and Mildred walked homeward with a good many thoughts yeasting in her brain.

CHAPTER III.

A GARDEN TEA-PARTY.

DOUGLASS says you are to come to Grassmere with us on Saturday." These were the first words that greeted Mildred the next day.

"But this is my best frock, and I have no other shoes." She stooped over and gazed at her patched boots with a pitiful intentness.

"Can't you buy better ones? There are lots in the stores," Connie asked.

"I am afraid we have no money to spare just now. But never mind; you can tell me all about it when you come to see me; it will make that much more to talk about," she said, quite cheerfully.

"But Grassmere is so lovely, and Douglass has

such lots of beautiful things to show us; besides there is the sail on the lake," Beth said.

Mildred winked very bravely, but a few tear-drops fell in spite of her efforts to keep them back.

"You will tell me all about it," she said presently.

"Only yesterday I did not know there was such a place, and I won't be a baby about it."

"If Douglass says it don't make any difference about your boots, will you come?" Connie asked doubtfully.

"Why yes, when there are so many pretty things, maybe they would never notice my boots, and I can put on a great deal of blacking. The patches don't show very badly." She twisted the little feet around while the children stood regarding them with troubled eyes.

"His mother is a real lady; everybody likes to have her notice them," Connie remarked encouragingly.

"But we would only see Douglass," Mildred said with evident alarm.

"Oh, an invitation from Douglass means dinner and everything. Sometimes you meet real live lords and their wives there. I tell you we ought to like you, for it is not often he asks any of the school-children out there."

"Let us play something," Mildred suggested. She had a healthy mind, and was not given to brooding over the unattainable. Their merry voices were soon ringing out over the play-ground, while some of the other girls joined them. Probably the fact that Mildred had become the *protégée* of Douglass Everett influenced them.

Connie did not wait long for an opportunity to interview Douglass respecting Mildred's visit to Grassmere and the limitations under which she was placed respecting the matter of holiday attire.

"She can wear what she pleases; we do not criticize the clothes our guests may wear. You little girls are sillier than I thought to make such a fuss about what you wear."

"It was Mildred spoke about it herself," Connie said, with considerable trepidation. After school she and Beth went home with Mildred.

"We have plenty of time, and we can just as well be talking over our visit as not," Connie placidly remarked. "And besides, we can see those children; maybe I will adopt them, too, as well as Beth."

"Let us buy them something," Beth suggested.

"We can get it on credit and pay to-morrow; papa always gives me money to pay my debts. He says it is not nice for little girls to owe money."

"I would rather you would not go in debt now," Mildred urged.

"Oh, he will say I am an excellent girl when I explain to him. I like him the best of any one in the world." Beth was in a most uplifted frame of mind. The performing of an unselfish act was such a new experience she scarcely knew what was the matter with her. They went to the store, where they were well known, and Connie, not to be outdone by Beth, resolved to be generous too.

"What would they like?" Beth asked Mildred, who was surveying the array of toys with a beating heart.

"Oh, anything here would be nice."

A shop girl came forward. "How much money will you spend?"

"Twenty-five cents; we will both spend that much." Connie sighed plaintively; that much money would buy a good many caramels.

Beth was the spokeswoman. "We want to lay out fifty cents for two poor children; won't you please to help us choose something?"

"Do you want toys or something useful?" the girl asked.

"We might get something that would work both ways," Beth suggested, as a sensible way out of the difficulty of making choice.

They decided at last on a tin trumpet for Paul and Noah's ark and doll for Grace. It was astonishing what a short way the fifty cents reached in making purchases. An hour later, after a very agreeable call at No. 8 Mulberry Street, Beth and Connie on the journey home decided they had never got so much satisfaction out of twenty-five cents in their lives. The delight of the two children at their presents, and the diligent use Paul made of his, though rather distressing when he chanced to be too near, was very enlivening, especially when they saw the commotion it created among householders in the neighborhood. They found the summer house a charming playhouse, the honeysuckle and climbing roses making it cool and fragrant. The only drawback to their pleasure was the presence of an occasional beetle or spider; but Mildred had a thrifty habit of turning everything to good account, so they soon learned, as Paul and Grace had done, to look upon them as tramps to be got rid of as quietly as possible. Mildred slipped into the house just before they left, and soon returned with a plate full of thin slices of home-made bread and butter. The pleasant surprise, combined with their hunger, made it seem to the children a very delicious luncheon.

"I wish we could come here every day," Connie remarked with a sigh as the last slice of bread disappeared.

"If it wasn't for papa, I wish we were your mother's children," Beth said wistfully. "She's so kind to you and smiles, and she really seemed pleased to see us." The latter was a marvellous circumstance to the child, whose experience of mothers was that they looked on children as perpetually in the way.

After they were gone, Mildred began to tell all the happy things that had befallen her that day. Unfortunately, however, as she told of the sudden friendliness of her visitors, the fact of their friendship being in the first place a purchased affair was revealed.

She concluded the day's experiences at last by saying: "May I go to Grassmere on Saturday with them?"

"Will you be willing to wear your patched shoes and plain frock and hat?"

"But Douglass said they did not criticize the clothes their visitors had on."

"Probably his mother never entertained such a poorly dressed visitor as you will be. But she is a genuine lady, and will make everyone about her feel comfortable, no matter what they may wear."

"Were you ever a lady, mamma?"

"Never any more than I am at present. I have been much richer, but that does not alter one's character. But why do you ask such a question?"

"Some of the girls were talking about you, how we got our money, and what you did for a living. I told them that our grandmother sent us some money from England, and that you earned the rest. They said some folks were so poor they did not even have a grandmother."

"Probably they sprang originally from such unfortunates themselves. But it is not wise for little girls to get ideas about wealth or ancestry into their heads. Some of our noblest men and women sprang from humble parentage; and some of the poorest specimens came from old families, proud of their ancestry. A poet has said:—

'Here and there a cottar's babe is born by right divine;
Here and there my lord is lower than his oxen or his swine.'

Young persons should endeavor to build for themselves, rather than depend on ancestors long gone to dust, for their greatness."

"I think that is as much as I can remember tonight, mamma," Mildred said, with a fatigued expression that provoked a smile from the mother, who was not given to preaching.

"And may I think about going to Grassmere on Saturday? This is only Tuesday, and I shall have such a lot of pleasure thinking about it."

"On condition you wear those boots. I may get a more suitable dress. Muslins are very cheap now."

"I wish you could make boots, too."

"Just be patient, darling. If I can only prove myself an artist in making prettily draped and fitting gowns, it will be better than shoe-making."

"I thought it was only folks who painted pictures were artists. I want to be one when I am a woman grown."

"Everyone who excels in her especial handicraft has a right to the title, I believe; besides, painting pictures is not the most useful calling in the world."

"But if I painted a grand picture which would make people glad ages after I was dead, that would be better than making frocks that would get worn out and be forgotten."

"Yes, better for you, my child, if it brought you bread as well as fame. But you are too young yet to discuss these things. You have been too much alone with books and your own thoughts. A child's soul may too soon get awakened."

"Well, I mean to try and paint my picture when I am a woman."

"You need not wait so long to do some notable work. Even children paint pictures that last for eternity."

"How, mamma?" she asked, amazed.

"By being pure and unselfish and diligent."

"But where will the pictures be? Have I made any yet?"

"On memory's wall, to be reproduced one day in wonderful vividness. I have found my daughter a help as well as comfort; that is a picture better than a good many that hang in the Paris Salon. What could I have done with the children this past year but for you?"

"But I couldn't do anything else but care for them. They had to be amused, or Paul would have gone with the boys on the street."

"And you could have gone too."

"Not when you told me not to," she said, as if disobedience to a mother's command was an act never perpetrated in this lapsed world.

It had been such an eventful day Mildred found sleep an exceedingly coy visitor, and she lay awake a long, long time for her, thinking what a very different world, on the whole, it was from what she had hitherto imagined, and what different kinds of boys and girls there were; mean-

while wondering if they carried the same characteristics on to manhood and womanhood, and did these grow more marked as the years multiplied.

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CHAPTER IV.

GIFTS.

WAKEFUL evenings make sleepy mornings usually for children, and Mildred was very sleepy indeed when she heard her mother's tap on the door. She sprang out of bed in a dazed sort of way, and hurried, I am sorry to say, with her prayers as well as dressing. She took the pitcher and started, as was her custom, for the day's supply of milk, which they got at the corner grocery; but when she opened the front door on her way out a cry of surprise brought them all out to see what was the matter. The pitcher was lying on its side and Mildred was standing beside it in the little portico that was seldom looked at night. In her hands were two brown

paper parcels, and through a rent in one she was peering excitedly at the toe of a pretty kid boot.

"Just look here, mamma. Who can these boots be for?"

"Perhaps Santa Claus brought them for me; I have been a very good boy lately," Paul said, stepping around, quite as excited as Mildred. Mrs. Kent took the parcels, first unrolling the boots.

"They are for Mildred. Here is her name written on the sole, and an excellent pair of kid boots they are."

"Maybe the other parcel is for me," Paul said, with decreasing hopefulness.

Mildred was now trying on the boots,—such a pair it had never been her lot to step around the green earth in before.

"O, my! what is it?" Paul exclaimed as, the paper removed, the folds of an exquisitely fine piece of merino that exactly matched Mildred's eyes was revealed. "And this is a dress for Mildred, the card here says. These little girls have been most generous in their purchases, but we must pay them some day," the mother said decidedly. Mildred stroked it lovingly and then turned resolutely away; the milk must be got and the breakfast eaten just

the same as on other days; but she started out on her errand one of the happiest children in the huge city. It was just like a fairy story; only she hoped Beth and Connie had not gone into debt for it.

Breakfast over, she started for school, she was in such haste to thank her schoolmates for their gift. She was early and had some time to wait; but at last she saw them and hastened to tell them what she had found at the door, and thanked them for it.

"But we did not put it there," Connie said emphatically. "We never could give that much. It was hard work to get the twenty-five cents; and I am never to go in debt for things to give poor children again." Mildred's face grew sad. She could see that Beth and Connie had suffered a considerable reaction of friendliness because of their spasmodic burst of generosity; but now Mildred's beautiful and mysterious present was the means of dispelling the cloud. It was charming to have a school-mate such a favorite with unseen powers; for since Beth and Connie had not brought her boots and dress, Mildred at once decided on giving the sailor husband the credit of the gift.

"He will bring gifts next time to his children, most likely," Connie suggested. "I hope he will find out soon about me and Beth being adopted too."

"You are so rich he may not think it necessary."

"But we enjoy presents and surprises just as much as poor children," Beth affirmed, nowise willing to be overlooked by folk real or imaginary. Mildred conked her lessons that day like one in a dream. The events of the past few days were so very unusual, that she was getting bewildered; but it was a pleasant sort of bewilderment. Douglass paid no attention to her during the day; but Beth and Connie again accompanied her home, by turns carrying their lunch-basket, which seemed a little heavy. The children were awaiting them at the gate, and Paul set up a prolonged tooting on his trumpet by way of showing his delight at seeing his benefactors.

"Cook gave us a double quantity of luncheon to-day on purpose to come here this evening," Connie said, after they had reached the summer-house.

"My! isn't that fine! Did you bring some

meat? "I like meat," Paul remarked, rather hungrily.

"I have some in mine," Beth said; "boiled tongue and chicken both." Paul's eyes glistened. Meat was too great a rarity with him. Mildred flitted around like some motherly bird, too happy for many words.

"Mamma lets me have weak tea. She says it won't hurt my complexion," Oecnie hinted.

Mildred went with the request to her mother and, as usual, found her willing to do her share in making the children happy.

Paul found his appetite so whetted by the cold tongue and relishing ham, that he scarcely knew when he had enough; while all the children enjoyed the picnic tea very much.

"I wish we could have supper like this every day," he said, regretfully picking up the last crumb of cake that lay on his plate.

"Well, we can have it pretty often," Beth said.

"I only wish papa could come some evening with us. He says he don't like big parties, where everyone wears their best clothes and company manners. When he was a boy he lived in the country and used to go to frolics, where they

worked all day to pay for the fun at night. He says that was real fun—not the make-believe kind."

"And do you have the parties that he don't like at your house?" Mildred asked.

"Oh yes; but I have to go to bed before the crowd comes. But I always get up and watch them over the banisters."

"Do you have tea and cake and meat for them?" Paul asked.

"Oh yes, you never saw such lovely things, and such quantities."

"You have some left for the next day?" Paul again asked.

"For a good many days. We get tired of it."

"I wish we could have parties. I would never get tired. When I am a man I will like them, I know."

"But it is only rich people who go to parties and have them."

"Maybe I'll be rich. It is a long time till then."

"You dear, foolish boy, you may never live to be a man."

"Yes I will. It is only very, very good boys that die."

"You are only a very good boy, I expect," Beth suggested.

Paul looked a trifle self-conscious. "Any way, I do lots of things for my mother, and I never swear or tell lies."

"I 'most think you are one of the dying kind. I do not see how you could be much better," Connie said, very seriously.

Paul looked a little frightened, and concluded to lower the standard of his goodness.

They fell to telling stories, when Paul, purely from anxiety as to his own safety, acted the part of naughty boy. Connie said at last, quite severely: "I think you will live to be a very old man. You are not one of the story-book kind of good boys." His face brightened, and after that his behavior was extremely circumspect.

The sun had set, and Mrs. Kent came to send the visitors home and take her own brood in from the falling dew. Beth and Connie put on their hats and took up the lightened lunch-basket. "We have had such a good time. I think it must be like the frolics father tells about," Beth said wistfully as she said good night.

"I am so glad Mildred came to our school.

She gets us better times than any of the girls have, and then we have Grassmere for Saturday," Connie remarked with much satisfaction.

"This is nicer than Grassmere," Beth said.

"You foolish girl, how can you say that? And you have never been at Grassmere to see how very lovely it is," Connie remonstrated.

"Well, this is perfect only for the beetles and spiders and things." Beth had a very wholesome respect for insects.

"My dear, you may come here as often as you wish, providing your parents are willing," Mrs. Kent said kindly.

"Our mothers don't love us as you do your children."

Mrs. Kent looked shocked. "You should not speak in that way about your dear mothers."

"When it is true, what else can we say?" Beth asked, with a wise shake of her little head.

"You do not know how much your mother loves you. If you should get sick you would find how much she thinks of you."

"Oh, I was sick. The doctor thought I would die, and she let nurse take care of me. She said it made her nervous up in the close, dark room."

Mrs. Kent looked sadly at the child and did not attempt a reply. She knew there were such heartless mothers among fashionable people, who had not strength to keep up in the social race and fulfil home obligations.

"Maybe if you were to die she might love you," Paul exclaimed eagerly, as if it might be a good plan to try the experiment.

"Baby Alice did die, and she didn't cry much. But papa and I cried. We were so sorry to see her put away in the dirty ground."

"I must not let you talk about your mother any longer. No doubt she loves her children as absorbingly as I do, but she has not the same way of showing it."

There were tears in poor little Beth's eyes. "You won't keep cross with me, for I want you to love me," she said pitifully.

Mrs. Kent stooped and kissed her tenderly. "I do love you, my pet, and you can think of me as another mother."

Beth nestled very affectionately in her new mother's arms, while Connie looked on curiously. Whatever Beth wanted another mother for was more than she could well conceive; her experience of that

relationship being mostly of an exasperating nature. But if it was going to be any benefit, she made up her mind to be a partner in it too.

Beth dried her tears, and kissing Mrs. Kent once more, followed Connie silently.

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CHAPTER V.

A MORNING CALL.

THE mist hung heavy above the city on Saturday morning; not a bit of blue in the sky, and the sun quite invisible. Beth and Connie had been around to tea the evening before, and Paul had so recklessly indulged in chicken-salad and ham-sandwiches, that through the night he made the discovery that he was the possessor of a very rebellious stomach.

Connie's mother had given a large party the evening before; hence the lunch-basket fairly creaked under its weight of dainties, since the cook had thrown in quite recklessly rich cake, jellies and meats variously prepared to please the palate and upset the digestion. The children

called for the remains on their way home from school, when Mildred, with amazed eyes, took in for the first time the splendore of Connie's home.

"Why, if I lived in such a house as this I would never want to go to Mulberry Street to play."

"Why, if you have no one to play with it is just as lonesome here as in the poorest house. Carpets and things are not any company, once you get used to them."

"But the lovely pictures!" Mildred said, with shining eyes.

She had caught a glimpse of walls lined with heavy gilt frames and dim pictures enclosed within. Such a tantalizing glimpse it was; if she could only have gone softly up to them, and, all alone, feasted her soul on their loveliness!

"Oh, those stupid pictures with coves and rocks and the sea and bare-necked women! I had rather look at the pictures in an almanac; for there is reading under them to tell what they are about, and then they are funny," Connie said contemptuously. "But I will tell you what we will do. Some day when mamma is sure to be away, you can come in and look at them just as long as you like."

"That would seem like stealing. If you told your mother that I wouldn't touch anything only with my eyes, maybe she would say I might come and look at them."

"She don't like children around, especially strange ones. I guess if you want to see them, you must come on the sly. She is just like Beth's mother, and don't care much for children."

"I expect it is because she is rich. Poor mothers sometimes die for their children."

"Never!" Beth exclaimed.

"I have read about them doing it."

"I am sure nobody ever died for another. Why, it could not be expected," Beth said decisively.

"You forget One who did." There was an expression of awe or Mildred's face as she spoke.

"I cannot forget what I never knew."

"The Lord Jesus Christ died for us."

Beth was silent for awhile. "But there were so many that he died for. Millions and millions."

"Yes. But I have read that He died for each one of us separately; just as if there wasn't another soul in the whole world to be saved but one's self."

"I would not read such things, if I were you,"

Connie said a trifle nervously. "Fairy stories are ever so much nicer."

"But the other is better for us in the end. I am very anxious to get to heaven when I die."

"Oh, so we all are; but there's plenty of time to think about those things. I hope you are not going to be tiresome and talk about death and all those dreadful things."

Mildred was silent, and soon after they were greeted by Paul's tin trumpet, which was rapidly becoming as great a nuisance in the neighborhood as the "Irishman's rooster" that Mrs. Carlyle so adroitly exorcised.

"I wish we had bought him a Jew's harp," Connie muttered, holding both hands to her ears. The table once spread and the lunch-basket emptied, Paul ceased blowing and sat with very watery mouth, watching the good things. The girls, whom the cook had treated to all the good things they could eat, decided it was much too early for tea, and sat telling stories. Paul was too much of a man to say anything, but Grace whimpered softly occasionally to have her supper. At last, in a pause in the story-telling, Paul suggested eagerly: "Let us make believe I am the sailor father come home nearly starved."

"I am nearly starving, too," Grace whispered, but so loudly they all overheard.

"It is no use for us to try to do anything. These children just want to be stuffing themselves all the time," Connie said angrily.

Paul winked very hard and then took up his trumpet. Beth, who was more tender-hearted, gave them a plate full of good things, and sent both children outside to eat them at their leisure. Mildred looked much happier, and proceeded to tell one of her most fascinating stories, making it up as she went along. Beth and Connie, whose imaginations were exceedingly sterile, wondered at the extent of her reading, but did not know they were frequently woven into the stories themselves.

The moment came at last when they graciously announced their readiness to have tea served. Paul wished for some time that he could sit and eat fruit-cake and chicken-salad forever; but at last he got sated even with these, and before very long wondered how he could have eaten them at all.

After tea the one theme that absorbed them was the morrow's visit.

"Maybe it won't be fine," Paul suggested. Things in general were beginning to wear a very dismal aspect to him.

"Of course it will be fine," Connie said oracularly. "Just see what a lovely sunset it is."

"I have often seen the sky look that way and a big storm come the next day," Paul affirmed, with the weather-wisdom of seven summers.

"I believe you want it to storm," Connie retorted.

"If it does you can come here again to-morrow. You needn't bring your victuals, either." Paul rather disliked the thought of these now.

"We won't come, no matter how hard it rains; and you are a very disagreeable boy."

Paul took his trumpet in silence and went to the roof of the shed. Up there he could toot to his heart's content, indifferent to the vindictive glances cast at him from neighboring windows. Mildred went out and surveyed the sky anxiously. There were certainly a good many clouds, but there were generally more or less of them in the finest weather. Beth and Connie went home at last, promising to be on hand before two o'clock next day. Mildred watched the sky; but the stars seemed to be holding their ground very bravely in spite of the clouds; so she went to bed quite light-hearted. Very early she awoke and, springing out of bed, was greeted by clouds and mists. She

crept sorrowfully back and waited to hear her mother astir, some unwelcome moisture filling her own eyes. "I might have seen such lovely pictures," she soliloquized. "I wonder if it would be wicked to ask God for a fine day?"

She lay meditating for some time on the subject, trying to recall an instance from the Bible when rain was withheld in answer to prayer; but Elijah's long drouth was the only one that she remembered. It would be terrible if her prayers should receive such an answer; so that she felt powerless to do anything in the matter, and soon a sharp patter against her window dashed every hope. Tired and sorrowful, she got up and dressed herself when she heard her mother astir. The mother, who was still young enough to remember the acute sorrows of childhood, tried in vain to comfort her.

"It may be quite fine by two o'clock. Such very heavy rain seldom lasts many hours."

Mildred went to see if there was the smallest bit of blue in the sky, but returned to her mother utterly disconsolate. "Maybe Douglass will never ask us again, and then Beth and Connie won't care for me, and I did so want to see the pictures

and have a sail on the lake." The tears were dropping silently on the table-cloth and her porridge stood untasted. Paul came clattering down stairs, giving an occasional puff at his trumpet. At sight of Mildred's dolorous face his own grew more sober. He looked indifferently at the breakfast, and altogether it did not promise a very happy day for any of them, with Mildred, who generally helped to make a good deal of sunshine in the home, so heavy-hearted, and Paul's digestive apparatus in a state of rebellion. But the mother proceeded to brighten up the rooms and make things as cheerful as possible. Mildred, overcome at last with loss of sleep and sorrow, lay down on the sofa and went fast asleep, while Paul curled up in the corner and was soon peacefully "knitting up the raveled edge" of last night's broken sleep. A knock at the front door at last disturbed the silent house. Mrs. Kent went, expecting to meet one of her patrons; when instead she saw a handsome lad, in dripping macintosh, on the doorstep.

"Does Mildred Kent live here?" he inquired. "Will you please tell her that a carriage from Graesmere will call for her at two o'clock?"

"Won't you come in and tell her yourself? To see her delight may be some slight recompense for your kindness."

Mrs. Kent's eyes were shining with something that looked strangely like tears. Douglass, for it was he, glanced at his dripping garments and then at the clean floor.

"A little water will quickly remove all traces of muddy boots. I should like Mildred to hear the welcome news from you. She has fallen asleep from sheer sorrow."

Douglass, without further hesitation, followed Mrs. Kent into the sitting-room, and with a quick survey took in its homelike air and neat appearance. Old pictures, that he decided were heirlooms, hung on the walls; a mahogany book-case in one corner was crowded full of books, while a small English harmonium stood opposite the fireplace; and on a large chintz-covered sofa lay Mildred and Paul, fast asleep. Grace, through her tangle of curls, was peeping at him from behind a huge arm-chair. Through an open door beyond he could see the bright yellow floor and polished tins and brasses of the cosy kitchen. Mildred still slept, her tear-washed face looking pitifully sad.

"Speak to her; she sleeps lightly," Mrs Kent whispered, keeping well out of sight herself.

Douglass hesitated, and then going lightly to her side laid his hand on the little brown head. She opened her eyes with a puzzled air, looking startled for an instant; but recognizing who it was, she sprang to her feet eagerly.

"Are we going to Grassmere?" she asked, forgetful of everything but her one supreme desire.

"Yes, we will send the carriage for you at two o'clock."

"Oh, Paul, just listen!" she cried, giving him a shake. "We are going to Grassmere, and in a carriage." Then she turned around humbly. "I forgot to thank you; but it is so long since I have had a drive in a carriage I can't remember what it is like, and it seems too good to be true. I am so glad I did not pray about the rain this morning," she added more sedately.

"Were you so anxious to go that you prayed about it?" Douglass asked with some amusement, as he sat down carefully on the corner of a chair. Mildred nodded her head rather shamefacedly. He would surely think her very childish indeed.

"Well, I shall not be at home next Saturday,

and I thought it would be tiresome for you to wait so long. We can have games, instead of the sail on the lake."

"Have you pictures with thick frames on them?"

"Why, of course; but what has the frames to do with them?"

"I suppose people do not take the trouble to frame poor pictures. If you are willing, I will look at them."

"But you would soon get tired."

"I do not think so. I never saw as many pictures as I wanted to."

"It seems to me you have had a good many limitations in your life. Never to school until this week, no carriage drives, and not even as many pictures as you wanted to look at."

"I expect I have," she said humbly, as if in some way she were to blame for it.

"Never mind. You shall have the drive, and I think we can satisfy you with pictures for once."

Paul had been sitting up in his corner of the sofa, an absorbed listener. Such a great lad as Douglas was quite a giant in Paul's eyes, accustomed only to little girls. He wanted so much to ask if he had dogs and rabbits and a jack-

knife, but modesty kept him silent. Douglass enjoyed sitting there. It was a new and on the whole rather pleasing experience. The clean, homelike room, the bright-faced children, the subtle, indescribable spirit of comfort that broods over some homes, which even such humble creatures as dogs and cats seem to recognize, was very manifest in Mrs. Kent's cottage. His own splendid home did not just then strike him as being a much more desirable habitation than this. To lounge on that roomy, chintz-covered sofa, with one of those old, leather-bound books to supplement whatever companionship the children might lack, listening to Mildred's quaint sayings, would be a quite jolly way of spending a rainy afternoon. Paul was watching him so wistfully, Douglass felt in his pockets for something to give him; but there was nothing but some useless bits of twine and his knife. Paul's eyes were devouring him now. He thought perhaps he was going to let him look at his knife. Douglass took it out, undecided whether it would be just the thing to offer him; they certainly did not seem like poor people, and a gift offered so openly might not be acceptable. Dropping parcels in the front porch was quite a different thing.

"Have you a knife? he ventured to inquire.

"No; but I have a tin trumpet. I would like a knife better."

"Did you never have one?"

"Yes, once; but it hadn't any blades, and a boy stole it from me."

"That was a misfortune; but you would have missed it more if there had been blades."

"I have been praying for a knife this long time; but I don't say that prayer when I do my other ones; and I just whisper it. Maybe it isn't heard way up in Heaven. Do you think they can hear so far away, anyway?" It was the first time Paul had voiced his unbelief in prayer, or confessed how very material his most earnest prayers were.

Paul was standing quite close to Douglass now, looking at him with such eager inquiry that the latter felt ashamed of his ignorance respecting the spirit world; but a bright thought struck him.

"I think your prayers have been heard, and I sent to answer them. I am not very good, but maybe I may serve for that." He was talking now more to himself than to the round-faced, eager-eyed boy at his side. "Would you think this knife

a good enough answer to your prayers? It has four blades and a cork-screw." He held it out to Paul, who, lost in admiration at its beauty, did not realize that it had just been presented to him. "Could I hold that knife in my hand while you stay here?" he asked at last.

"Why, won't you take it and keep it? I can get another on my way home." Douglass really wanted the boy to have it.

"For my own, for ever and ever?" Paul exclaimed, in his excitement falling naturally into a devotional form of expression.

"Well, as long as you and the knife last. I hardly think it will be forever, unless you are very different from average boys."

"I wish I could do something for you. Would you like to have my trumpet?"

"No, thank you."

"You might at least thank him," Mildred suggested, with some reproach in her voice.

"Thank you is not enough." He appealed to Douglass for confirmation of this assertion.

"It usually serves to express one's gratitude."

"Why, I say that for a piece of bread. Would you like little Gracie to kiss you? Her kisses are real good."

"If it will be agreeable to her to give me one, and it may relieve your feelings a little."

Paul went for Gracie to help him clear off his deep indebtedness. But she was not used to bestowing her favors promiscuously, and would not come. He urged her, even offering to take her into partnership with his knife; but she was obdurate.

"Never mind; for really I must go now," Douglass said, and arose to leave. The children stood watching him until he was out of sight, two of the happiest children among a whole city full; and all this happiness so easily bestowed by a generous-minded lad who had discovered very early what most folks never perfectly learn, "that it is more blessed to give than to receive."

CHAPTER VI.

JACK CARVER.

POSSIBLY a second kingdom added to the dominions of some great potentate would not bring to his heart such intense, unalloyed delight as this ivory-handled jack-knife did to the child-heart of Paul. A pair of new shoes to a child to whom new shoes are an unusual experience, brings more pleasure than a shop full of them to the same individual at fifty. What would thrill and enrapture the soul at fifty would be an incomprehensible joy at six. Will the human heart thus continue to outgrow itself through the eternities? Or do we at fifty reach the highest altitudes of spiritual and intellectual development? Perplexing enough questions, but unanswerable

until the mysteries of our existence, unsolvable save by death, are made plain. But when we can add, at so little outlay, to the sum total of earthly happiness, not too large at the best, by making children's hearts glad, is it not a wonder we are not busier in search of chances to increase the store of happiness?

The rain kept dropping steadily until noon, while Mildred watched the leaden skies with a new anxiety. If it cleared off brightly they might not send the carriage, and it would be such a pity to lose the ride. At noon the sun shone brightly, with only here and there a graceful cloud flecking the blue dome. Mildred, with much persuasion, managed to swallow a bite of dinner, wondering meanwhile how Paul, whose appetite had returned with its accustomed vigor, could eat so much, or that Grace could relish her third slice of bread and butter. She waited with feverish anxiety while her mother did up the work before helping her dress for Grassmere; but when the finishing touches of the mother's deft fingers were completed and Mildred stood ready for the carriage, a more winsome or dainty maiden could scarcely be found in castle or cot. The blue merino matched so

perfectly the eyes that now were changing, under strong excitement, to violet, and the color came and went in the sweet flower-face bewitchingly, although there was no one there who had leisure to watch and admire it.

She stood by the window, alternately surveying the street and watching the clock. The minutes went so slowly that if all life passed with equal tardiness to mankind, a centenarian might date his birth from the creation. Presently there came tripping through the garden gate Beth and Connie, resplendent in all the freshness of their best clothes. Paul ran to meet them, his jack-knife suspended in mid air, the tin trumpet ignominiously dropped in the coal-box.

"Douglass has been here, and just see what he gave me," he cried, holding out the knife for them to admire.

"Who cares for a jack-knife? Is Mildred ready to go?"

Paul fell back quite crushed, and did not trouble himself to reply. He saw a boy coming down the street—much such a looking one as walked off with his last knife-handle. He stood back at a safe distance from the gate, and holding up his treasure cried out: "Just look at that for a beauty!"

The lad glanced around carelessly. "I can't see anything but your fist."

"Can't you see the knife? Four blades and a corkscrew?"

"Not a hair of it. Fetch it here, and I'll take a look at it."

Paul, struggling with the desire to show his knife, yet fearful of losing it, stood uncertainly.

"Come along; I am in a great hurry."

Paul moved a little nearer and, holding it up, said: "You can see it now."

"Blamed if I can. You don't expect I'll eat it."

"No, but you might steal it, as one of you did my other one."

The lad made a spring, and before Paul realized what had happened, boy and knife were disappearing through the gate.

He screamed at the top of his voice: "He has stolen my knife." And forgetful of his mother's command to the contrary, plunged after them into the street.

"Stop your noise, I haven't got your knife," the boy hissed.

"Please somebody make him give me my knife,"

Paul wailed, in his agony not noticing the carriage with a handsome pair of horses just at hand, and Douglass sitting beside the driver and holding the reins. He recognized bare-headed, screaming little Paul, and, jumping down, had the larger boy, to whom Paul was clinging, by the arm in a second or two.

"What have you been doing to this child?"

"None of your business what I've done." He turned to Paul:

"Has he got the knife I gave you this morning?"

"Yes, he snatched it from me, and won't give it up."

"Come here, Peter," Douglass called, while he still held the wriggling boy firmly by the shoulder. "Tie the horses to something and come." The coachman was soon on the spot, and searching the young thief's pockets; but there was no trace of the knife.

"We will take him around to the nearest police station. For he has certainly got it," Douglass said, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "It is not so much for the knife, but it will be a lesson to him; a few months in the Reformatory will teach him better manners."

"That little cove couldn't send me to the Reformatory."

"No, but I can." The boy began to fear he had got into a bad scrape. Stooping down, he slipped off a very old shoe, revealing a soiled foot with a shred of stocking hanging to it. He gave the shoe a shake and out fell Paul's knife. Mrs. Kent was standing in the group now, drawn thither by Paul's screams. The poor, frayed stocking and forlorn appearance generally of the boy moved her pity. Before he had time to run off, her hand was lightly resting on his ragged coat.

"What is your name, my boy?" she asked, so kindly that he looked up amazed and answered quite readily, "Jack Carver."

"Do you live near here?"

"Yes, away up this street, off in an alley-way."

"With your parents?"

"Mother's dead. Father's got another wife, and she tries to lick me."

"I make no doubt he deserves twice as much as he gets," the coachman interjected.

"We all deserve a great deal more punishment than we get. This poor fellow has not been blessed with our opportunities."

"I say, I am real sorry I grabbed your boy's knife." Jack's bright eyes were looking up into Mrs. Kent's face with the pitiful expression we sometimes catch in the eyes of our dumb relations.

"Maybe it will all turn out for the best. Who knows how much good we may do each other if we get acquainted and become friends?"

"I'm not fit to be friends with the likes of you. I wish I was. I'd be true as steel."

It was Mrs. Kent's turn to be amazed,—a street Arab affirming his capability of fulfilling one of the highest possibilities of humanity. The girls were waiting at the gate with much impatience, but Mrs. Kent, who was something of a philanthropist, was looking for an opportunity to do good.

"I will be your friend," she said. "We can be mutual friends. Will you come to see me next Sabbath afternoon? I will read you some stories my own children like to hear."

"Yes, Bible stories that tell about stealing," Paul said scornfully.

"Yes, I will come, and thank you, ma'am," Jack said, coloring a little at Paul's remark. Then he ran down the street, and at the first corner disappeared from sight.

The girls were clambering into the carriage, Mildred kissing her hand to her mother as the horses started merrily off, while Paul stood watching with a new and most consuming desire starting into life in his heart to have horses to drive himself.

The knife and trumpet were both neglected that afternoon, so long as Gracie consented to be driven, with many turnings and whoas, until she was utterly weary and refused to respond to the lines any longer. Then Paul engaged in animated conversation with his mother about the horses his grandmother owned, and the farm servants privileged to drive them. If he were only in beautiful old England, he might be as happy as Douglass. He resolved some day to cross that great mysterious ocean his mother described, but which he could never fully understand, and walk into the dim, old kitchen, where his grandmother superintended her maids making the butter and cheese.

Altogether this was one of the notable days in in Paul's life, its incidents on his memory, perhaps, one day to be repeated to other bright-eyed little boys—his own grandchildren in the remote, strange future.

CHAPTER VII.

GRASSMERE.

MRS. KENT found the day an exciting one, as well as the children. How was Mildred's visit going to succeed? Would her expectations be fulfilled, or would she come home grieved and disappointed, as from her first day at school? It seemed, even to the mother's sober fancy, more like a chapter out of fiction than a reality, that her child should be a guest at Grassmere. In Madame Laramie's dressmaking establishment, where Mrs. Kent had learnt her trade, Mrs. Everett of Grassmere had been an authority in matters of taste; for her best bonnets and gowns came direct from Paris, and even Madame herself was put in a flutter by an occa-

sional call from her. Others besides Beth and Connie regarded an invitation to Grassmere as an honor to be accepted with deep thankfulness.

The afternoon continued fine, the sun shining brilliantly until his setting. Even Mulberry Street was in holiday attire after the refreshing rain,—the blades of grass in the little garden-plot looked greener and more cheerful with the smoke and dust washed down into their roots. How, then, must Grassmere, with its stately trees, brilliant gardens, marble statues and fountains, look to Mildred, so unaccustomed to anything but brick and wood! The pictures hanging in their still loveliness on the walls would surely seem tame in comparison with the fresher loveliness of the newly-washed outside pictures fashioned by God's own hand, their beauty retouched according to the cultivated rules of human taste.

Paul experienced a fresh sorrow just before nightfall, from his jack-knife,—a blade unfortunately penetrated the flesh, instead of the stick he was fashioning into a button for the play-house door. He went sorrowfully to bed, the knife laid securely beyond his reach, and his hand bound up in sticking-plaster. Grace, as usual, sympathized

with him, creeping softly into his bed to mingle her tears with his, where their mother found them fast asleep some hours later.

The twilight had nearly left the sky to the charge of the stars that were dropping into their places along the welkin, when the sound of voices at her gate called Mrs. Kent to the door. There was Mildred, rushing eagerly up the garden-walk. Mrs. Kent went into the room and lighted the lamp. The home would look poor and dark enough at the best after the splendors of Grassmere.

"Oh, mamma, do you think heaven is just every bit as lovely as Grassmere?" Mildred cried eagerly.

Her mother turned to look at her glowing face, and hands filled with rare hot-house flowers.

"Did you have as much pleasure as you expected?"

"A great deal more. Oh, if you could only go too! But do you think papa's house up in heaven — his mansion, I mean — is quite equal to Mrs. Everett's?"

"Yes dear, far more beautiful; with no shadow of death to darken it."

"I do not see how any one could want to die at Grassmere. Death himself must feel sorry, I am sure, to enter there."

"Not if he should come to take them to a grander home, my child. But tell me about your visit."

"You will let me tell everything? It won't be mean, as if they were people just like ourselves."

"You may tell me all you wish," the mother said with a smile.

"Then I will begin just after we got into the carriage," Mildred said, complacently, taking off her hat and spreading out her dress to keep it from wrinkling.

"It seemed so funny to be moving along faster than folks on the street who were walking, and yet to be sitting still; and the houses seemed to be moving too, and the fences, when the horses went fast. I wonder if I ever had a ride before — I can't remember." She paused for her mother to assure her once again that long, long ago, she used to go to church in her grandmother's carriage, past the pink and white hawthorne hedges, and through the pleasant country lanes in old England.

She sat silent for a while, as she had done many a time before, vainly trying to recall that exquisite experience; but memory, it would seem, had made no picture of it on her walls. With a little sigh or regret she continued: "Beth and Connie were so happy, they couldn't keep still; but it wasn't the ride that made them so, for they said they had all the rides they wanted. I must have been too contented to move; for I just wanted to sit still and watch the people in the streets; only I felt sorry for them, that they were not in carriages too, and going to have a pleasant time like us. Maybe that is the way people feel just after they die and are on their way to heaven. I was sorry when we left the road and turned into a great gate-way, with tall pillars — Connie said they were — and an arch, and just inside the prettiest little house, which she said was the gate-keeper's lodge. There were flowers growing everywhere, and trees, and spouts with water coming out, that Beth said were fountains; and there were statues made of white marble standing on granite bases. I think they would look cold in winter.

Her mother smiled. Mildred was always think-

ing of other people's comfort, and her sympathy, it seemed, included even marble statues.

"The carriage stopped, and then Douglass led us into the house. It is just like a castle, prettier than a good many of the castles we have in pictures. I was ashamed to go in when I looked around and saw everything so grand, and I didn't keep up with the others as they went up the steps. It was so different from our house, it made me feel just like Cinderella." A flush stole over the little face that, in its delicacy of coloring, reminded one of a rose-petal. She hesitated a moment, but seeing her mother so interested, went bravely on: "Douglass turned around at the door and saw me. He came down the steps again — there were a lot of them, — and took me by the hand. 'Why don't you come up?' he asked. I didn't know just what to say, and felt quite badly, but at last I said very low: 'If you please, I would sooner stay out here. It is too grand for me in there.' I could hardly keep the tears back; but I tried very hard, and they stayed away. Then he said: 'The pictures are inside, and I have told my mother you are coming.' He spoke so kindly I was not afraid any more, and went right

up the steps. Then a big man with a red face opened the door. I thought he must be Douglass's father, he looked so dignified; but the girls told me afterward he was the butler, and that Douglass's father has been dead ever since he was a baby." She hesitated a moment, and then looking up with a perplexed expression, said: "I don't think I can tell you how it looked inside. I did not know the names of things, and there was so much to see; besides, I got a little frightened again, and wished so much I was at home with you and the children. Douglass kept hold of my hand, but he had no trouble with Beth and Connie, for they weren't a bit afraid. He led us away up stairs to such a pretty room. We saw doors opening into great rooms, with pictures and such elegant furniture; but this room was smaller, and everything was made of pretty blue satin. There were lots of flowers with birds flitting in and out of their cages among them; but the nicest of all was Douglass's own mother. She looked so like an angel, only a little older than they usually are. She had on a white dress with blue ribbons and flowers. Douglass said: 'Mamma, this is the little girl I told you about, and

these are her playmates.' And only just think! She took hold of my hand and looked at me for a while, and then she put her arm around me and kissed me. She seemed so sweet, before I thought what I was doing I put up my mouth and kissed her right on the cheek. After that I was not frightened again. She shook hands with Beth and Connie, but did not kiss them; and all the time she kept her arm around me. Then a girl came in, with a muslin cap on, and a white apron, and led us away to a room where we took off our hats. She brushed our hair and tied on our ribbons again, and kept talking all the time about how much she liked little girls, and wished they had a few there. Then she took us back to the blue room, and Douglass got some games for Beth and Connie, and took me away to look at the pictures. Such a grand room, as large as a meeting-house, with more statues in marble standing around; but they did not look so cold in the house. I asked who they represented, and if he could tell about them. Douglass said perhaps he would some time; but it would take too long then. The carpet was so soft it rested the feet walking on it; and there were so many looking-glasses, that I

kept turning around to see the other little girl with the blue merino frock, forgetting it was myself. And there were tables and little shelves covered with such lovely things, and great, high windows with curtains that looked as fine as a spider's web; but the pictures were best of all. Douglass took a book while I looked at them, but it took me so long he asked if I would be afraid to stay alone; and then he showed me a tassel I was to pull if I was tired, and some one would come for me. I think I must have seen the place one of the pictures was taken from some time, for it came so close to my heart. It was a great, high rock, and away behind it was the shore, with green fields and trees, and cows standing in a brook; and the sky looked as it did to-day when the sun was setting. When Mrs. Everett asked me the picture I liked best, and I told her that one, she said: 'You are an excellent judge, for that is the best one in our collection.' That picture, kept me so long, I had hardly any time for the others. I was much surprised when Mrs. Everett and the girls came and told me I had been there nearly two hours. Maybe they thought I would be in mischief, so they came to find what

I was doing. After that we went to the music-room, and Mrs. Everett played for us; the music was better than any I ever heard before. Afterward Douglass came and said we could have our sail on the lake. The maid brought out rugs for us to sit on, to keep our frocks dry; but I had seen so much I was getting stupid. I know we went along a path with great trees that seemed to be shaking hands over our heads, and they were so close we could only see a little bit of blue between the leaves; then we came out on the lake. The trees were all around it, and they seemed to be stooping over to see themselves in the water. Some of them were so handsome it seemed quite natural they should like to see their shadow. You could scarcely tell where the trees ended and the water began. Douglass put up the sail, but it wouldn't go; and so he took the oars and rowed right out into deep water. I was frightened at first; for I thought if the bottom should happen to fall out of the boat, I would soon be going away up into the deep, blue sky, and somehow it seemed quite dreadful just then to die; but if heaven is really better than Grassmere, I suppose it would be a good thing; but we are not positively certain, are we?"

"Yes dear, positively certain. Queen Victoria, if she trusts in Christ and serves Him, will have a richer crown and a more beautiful home when she dies than she had on earth."

Mildred seemed hardly convinced, but she went on with her description.

"We had our sail. I didn't tell them I was frightened, but I was very glad when we got on the ground again. Then Douglass showed us the horses, and his own pony and dogs and rabbits, and the doves and bantams, and all sorts of hens and things. Some of them came and ate out of our hands; and we picked a great many flowers. Douglass told us the ones the gardener was willing for us to have; and then we sat down on the steps of one of those marble people,—Douglass told us who it was—I forget now, but he was a great man who wrote books. We arranged our flowers there. I picked every one of these," she said, as if still surprised at the wonderful fact,—she who for five or six years had never gathered any choicer blossoms than a weak-looking buttercup or dandelion in their own tiny grass-plot. "Then a bell rang, and Douglass said it was time to go in to dinner. Only think! they have their dinner at

six o'clock. But my! it was such a dinner. 'I wished so much that you could have one just like it. The man that let us in stood behind our chairs and gave us everything we wanted. I kept hoping he wasn't hungry, and could have some of the good things. The table looked so beautiful, and the room was 'most like a church with a round window right in the roof, and it was so high I couldn't help looking up to see the bright clouds over our heads. There were other windows round at the top, like St. Malachi's and some of the panes were red and purple and green. Mrs. Everett kissed me again when she said good-bye, but she didn't ask us ever to go back, and we really could not expect it. Wasn't it just like what we read about? I believe I shall remember how kind they were and how lovely their home is, a long time after I get to heaven. If we all get there, wouldn't it be nice to invite them to our mansion sometime, and thank them for all their kindness? I shall never have a house good enough in this world." She looked at her mother eagerly for a reply.

"I do not know if they do such things in heaven. I never thought of it before; but be sure the very best way to thank them will be to be found there.

The cup of cold water given to one of Christ's little ones gets its reward. But now you must go to bed. The little tongue must be tired, if the feet and brain are not."

"I won't want to go to sleep. It will be so pleasant to lie awake and think it all over. Maybe I shall never have just such a happy day again."

She said her prayers and kissed her mother good night; but the shining eyes and flushed, excited face did not promise a healthy awakening.

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CHAPTER VIII.

MR. FELTON.

MILDRED'S attention wandered sadly from the preacher's sermon the following morning. She and Paul went regularly to St. Malachi's church on Sunday morning, because it was the nearest and the seats were free, and there was always an abundance of empty ones. The mother attended her own church, a much larger one, in the evening; but it was too far away for Paul to accomplish the walk comfortably. The adherents of St. Malachi's were a mere handful, and the gentle-hearted rector often got discouraged over his slim following and the poor results that his ten years in the parish showed. Mildred used to wait regularly at the little side-door to have him shake

hands with her and Paul as he passed out of the vestry, and sometimes—but it was a very rare occurrence—he walked down the street with them, and encouraged her to talk about his sermon. This morning she shook hands rather hurriedly, and was hastening away, anxious to escape conversation with him. But unfortunately he had a fancy that morning to hear her talk. He took his hat and cane, leaving the sexton to lock the vestry door, and overtook the children before they got out of the graveyard, which held a good many of the earliest settlers of the city,—so long buried now that the graves were falling in, and the headstones were nearly all out of the perpendicular, the names and virtues of the dwellers below pretty well worn away by the elements.

"You do not seem anxious to talk with me this morning, my little friend," Mr. Felton said, as he overtook them.

"No, for I cannot repeat much that you said to us this morning," Mildred honestly confessed.

"And why is that?"

"I was thinking so much about Grassmere and what I saw there yesterday. I expect it is very wicked to let myself think of those things in church,

especially when you are so kind as to tell us how to be good."

"I expect it is; but very few are as honest as you in confessing their wandering thoughts."

"Perhaps grown-up people never forget that the minister is preaching. I did for ever so long this morning."

Mr. Felton smiled, but Mildred noticed that his eyes looked sad. They walked on for some distance in silence.

"I do not think I will ever do so again," she continued, sorrowfully; "but I had never seen any place so beautiful as Grassmere, and mamma says if we get to heaven, we shall have a lovelier home than that. I began to wonder why everyone wasn't good so as to make sure of getting there, just when you began to preach, and then I went on thinking my own thoughts for a long time; but I listened to you at the last, when you told us we should try to make each other happy. I am going to begin doing that right away." Mildred had never talked quite so freely or lengthily to the good rector before.

"Bless you, my child! you listened, after all, to excellent purpose; better, I am afraid, than any one else there."

"I have a jack-knife and have cut myself," Paul remarked somewhat uncertainly. He was afraid jack-knives were not suitable subjects for Sabbath conversation, especially with ministers; but Mr. Felton was very absent-minded, and Paul's remark fell unheeded.

"You have been coming to St. Malachi's for a long time," Mr. Felton said, rather abruptly.

"Yes, ever since papa died. He and I used to go together in the morning to Grace Church. It is too far for Paul to walk."

"Is your mother living?"

"Oh, yes, we could not have spared her too. It was very, very hard having papa go." Mildred's voice grew tremulous.

"It has never occurred to me to ask where you live. I took it for granted that your parents were connected with our church."

"I suppose it does not make much difference what church we attend, if we only listen well to the preacher and do as he tells us," Mildred said apologetically.

"Well, no. I cannot agree with that proposition. It is of paramount importance that we have correct religious knowledge. But I will call and discuss these topics more fully with your mother shortly."

I am getting up a class for confirmation, and may get you to join it. You are rather young, but your religious nature seems unusually well developed."

Mildred did not wholly understand the minister's conversation; but the confirmation-class struck her as something very desirable, and she kept repeating the word over to herself to keep from forgetting it. If her mother could not explain its meaning, the dictionary could. She had often sought its help in her rather extensive range of reading.

They reached Mr. Felton's corner at last: this time he stopped, and changing his cane to his left hand, shook hands with both Mildred and Paul. He had never done this before at parting, in all their acquaintance; and as she continued on her way to Mulberry Street, she speculated as to how much longer unaccustomed and really wonderful things were going to happen to her. Scarcely a week since she started for school, and now what wider ranges were broadening out to her intellectual vision! Life had suddenly assumed a wholly changed aspect, her ideal world was fading into thin air, while the real one was growing more beautiful than her limited knowledge of things had enabled her to picture.

Mildred repeated the text and what she could remember of the sermon, as they sat after dinner with their Bibles ready to begin the hour's lesson which the mother invariably held on Sunday afternoons. She had not much to tell, but supplemented this shortage by repeating Mr. Felton's conversation. She had not got through when a timid knock at the back door surprised them. Mrs. Kent went to see who was there, followed by the children. Paul looked slightly alarmed when he saw Jack Carver's shining face, fresh from a plentiful application of soap and water; but the mother received him so graciously, Paul was ready to welcome him too.

"We were just beginning our lesson, so we will go right on with it," Mrs. Kent said, as she placed a comfortable arm-chair for Jack to sit on. He did not look particularly comfortable for some time, however; the remembrance of yesterday's episode, taken with the neat, refined surroundings, had a subduing effect. Mrs. Kent gave him a Bible, and with a delight he had never experienced before that he could read, he readily found the chapter that contained the day's lesson. They were going regularly through the Old Testament, and had got as far

as Samuel's call by God to take the place of Eli's unworthy sons. Jack had begun to dip into literature, but it was of the most sensational character, while he regarded the Bible with much the same lofty contempt that is meted to it by some of our latter-day scientists. He certainly would not have taken the trouble to polish up for this hour's study of its pages, but that Mrs. Kent had in some subtle fashion won his heart completely. She tried to make the lesson interesting to him, and from the look on his face concluded her efforts had not been in vain. She had not confined herself solely to Samuel's mysterious call at midnight, and his brave response to God, but went back and forth over the long lives of worthies — Adam and Enoch, Moses and Elias and many another elect one, — who through their righteousness have been immortalized.

"He don't talk to folks now-a-days," Jack hazarded at last. His scripture knowledge was extremely limited, but he felt safe in saying that much.

"I think He does far more than He did in olden times. Now the humblest, most desolate soul can come to Him with their sins and griefs, and be comforted and forgiven. Long ago they only came through the high priest; and he only once a year

entered into the holy place and beheld the shining of God's glory. To-day we can each of us abide there, and hold continual communion with Him."

"I didn't know folks could do that. I thought they got religion just to keep them from going to hell, and that it was mostly something like life insurance—you are always paying, and you have to die to get your money back."

Mrs. Kent smiled in spite of herself, while the children looked extremely horrified to hear any one talk so about religion.

"When you have studied the Bible longer and learned more about the happy lives and triumphant deaths of God's faithful ones, your views will be entirely changed. Do you read much in your leisure time?" Jack colored and felt exceedingly like shielding himself with a lie; but with M.s. Kent's honest eyes upon him, he felt it to be next to impossible.

"I read a lot, but it isn't about the kind you are telling me of. I expect they're the Devil's children, with flesh and bones like the others, but nothing else."

"Does it do you any good to read about them?"

"No, indeed, but it's exciting, and makes me forget my own aggravations for a while."

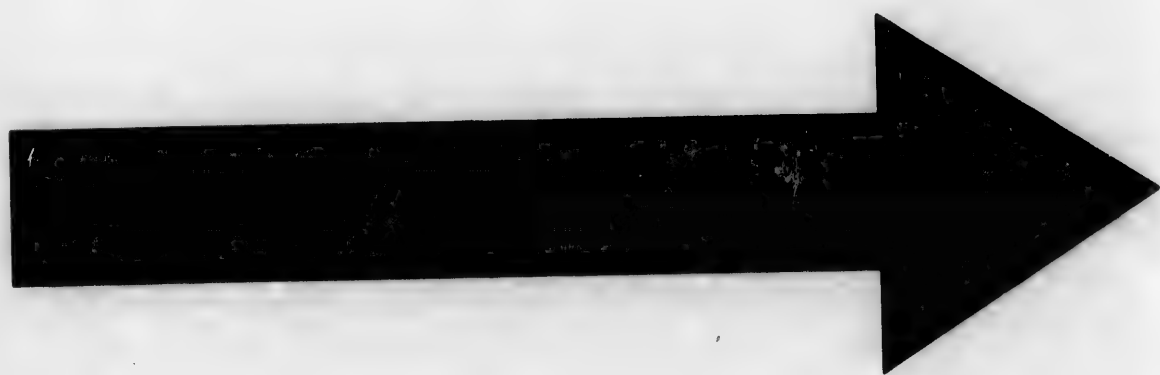
"But it don't help you to bear the unpleasant things afterward, nor make you happier, does it?"

"I get mad quicker'n ever; and if it wa'n't for the bobby I'd try to do some of the smart tricks the books tell about. I did try yesterday," he added, shamefacedly.

"If I lend you good stories, will you read them?"

"There's some youngsters home.—If they'd get hold of your books 'twould be the last of them."

Mrs. Kent was silent for a moment, for she was very careful of her books,—most of them gifts from dear ones divided now by the wide sea, or the river of death. She looked at Jack. He was gazing a trifle listlessly out of the window. He had the forsaken look of one for whom nobody cares. Was it accident or "the divinity that shapes our ends" that had drifted him to her side? If he could be rescued to stand at last among the shining ones, what matter if some of her books got destroyed? Jack's face suddenly brightened. "Would you mind if I dropped in here at odd times when I had no chores to do, and read your books on the doorstep or anywheres out of your way? If you have a woodshed it would do me in warm weather as well as the Queen's drawing-room."



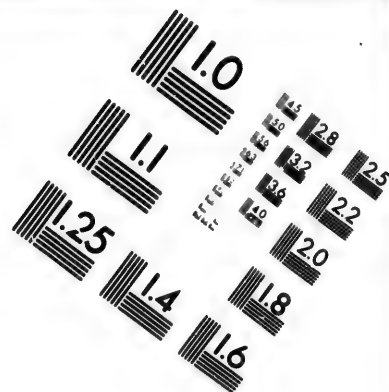
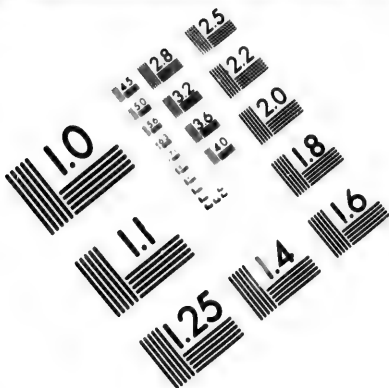
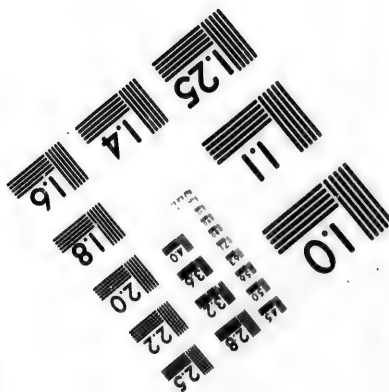
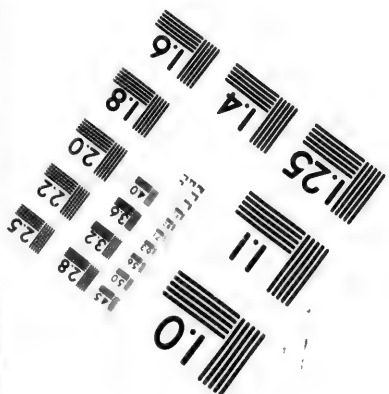
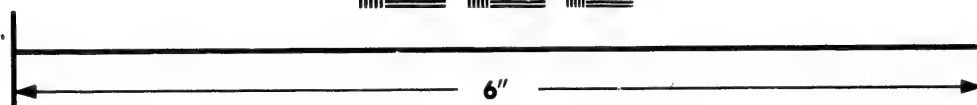
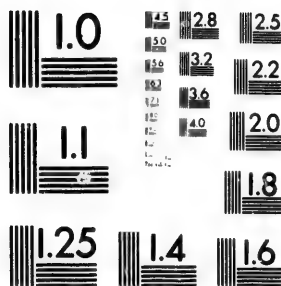


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Mildred mildly suggested that he should say *drawing-room*; but he was too much interested in what Mrs. Kent was saying to heed her correction.

"You shall sit beside me and read aloud, and we can talk over what you read; so we shall both be benefited," she said cheerily. Jack's face expressed keen delight; and a very good face it was when good thoughts were at work behind it.

"Do you ever go to church?" Paul asked.

"Never," Jack responded heartily. "They don't care for coves like me there, who haven't the ready to put in the box."

"Come with me to-night," Mrs. Kent said, "and you will find they make you welcome without a cent."

"The boys 'll think I'm getting good for sure, if I do that."

"Do you care very much what they think?"

"Well, no; but they chaff a fellow if they find he's turning over a new leaf. I've done it myself."

"Do you have less respect for those boys who are trying to do better?"

"No, indeed, but there's precious few, turns."

"Will you come then to church with me to-night?"

Jack stood cap in hand; he looked keenly at Mrs. Kent and then at his own shabby clothes.

"You'd be ashamed of me—these are my best duds."

"Can you not believe I am in earnest? I want to help you to be a noble man. Just as I would wish someone to help my own boy if God were to take me from him." Jack's eyes glistened.

"I'll go anywhere you want me. I'll be here in time to-night."

His voice was more softly modulated than usual when he spoke. Then he turned to the door, saying good-bye in the same subdued fashion. Jack himself was amazed at seeing a few tears trickling off his face as he walked slowly around the house and down the garden-walk; but he got his feelings safely under control before he ventured on the street; for he had a great many acquaintances whose remarks might quickly restore his usual frame of mind.

CHAPTER IX.

AT CHURCH.

AFTER Jack left, Mildred took the children to the summer-house, to continue the Sunday-school in more orthodox fashion ; and presently Paul's treble was heard trilling out a favorite carol as they solemnly opened the school, while the mother was left to enjoy the happiest hour in all the week in the solemn hush of the Sabbath afternoon. Comforting influences were always about her at this hour, loved ones safely escaped to a serener realm were tenderly remembered, and, better than these, the Master himself drew near and held communion with His loving disciple. After the school had been satisfactorily concluded, Mildred, as usual, told them a Bible-story. To-day it was that beau-

tiful idyl that has charmed young hearts, Jew and Gentile, for thirty centuries, — Ruth gleaning among the reapers in loving obedience to Naomi, and her romantic union with the rich Boaz, that ended at last in the immortal renown of being the ancestress of our Lord.

Paul ventured the wish that he might be the ancestor of some one remembered in after ages.

"Why not be great yourself?" Mildred suggested. "I think it's as easy to be great and good now as it ever was."

"It must be pretty hard work to get so high," Paul said warily. The day was hot and their lesson had been long; hence he was not in an ambitious mood. Grace, grown tired of so much food for the intellect, concluded it was time to look after her tea, and had her mother soon recalled to the necessary activities even of the Sabbath-day. The hungry little mouths were again satisfied, their prayers said, the evening hymn sung while the mother accompanied the clear young voices on the harmonium; and then they were safely tucked in bed, where their tongues could wag as busily as ever, until kindly, refreshing sleep hushed them into silence.

Jack presented himself promptly on time, his

clothes looking more shabby than ever beside Mrs. Kent's handsome mourning costume—a welcome gift from across the sea. He seemed so uncomfortable about his appearance that, to reassure him, Mrs. Kent sat with her bonnet on and read to him the second chapter of James' Epistle.

"But folks now-a-days don't mind all that the Bible tells them, not even the preachers," Jack said, still unconvinced of the propriety of his appearing in God's house in shabby garments.

"If you should some day be a preacher, you will find how easy it is for us to stand outside and self-complacently criticize them instead of taking the Bible as our mutual standard."

"I could never be a preacher. They are all gentlemen."

"I hope they are; but hundreds of them were no better off in their boyhood than you."

"I'd sooner be an alderman, if I riz at all."

"I expect to see your ambition change. I have great hopes to see you a noble man some day."

Jack flushed with pleasure, but his face soon fell.

"I've never heard of a single Carver being anything but common folks."

"There must always be a beginning to everything," Mrs. Kent said, as she locked the door.

Jack was inclined to fall a little behind her along the street, for two very good reasons. He felt certain she must be ashamed to be seen with him, and then he was a trifle ashamed to be seen with her by any of his friends who might be out for a saunter. Mrs. Kent humored him, but when they got to the church door she waited for him. Jack knew the church well. He had many a time hovered around outside to listen to the singing, which was hearty and voluminous, and calculated to attract even the lapsed street Arabs. Fortunately, there was a crowd entering, a good many of them very stylish in appearance; but Jack's practised eye saw that Mrs. Kent appeared as much a lady as the best of them; and with a little swelling of pride he took off his cap and boldly followed her to her pew. A few eyes were turned with surprise towards the strangely mated pair; but Mrs. Kent was a heroine in small matters as well as great, while Jack was so inspired by the organ strains that for a while he forgot Bagge Alley, his ill-tempered step-mother, and the other ills of his poor life. In a comfortable way he grouped himself with the rich bankers, merchants, and professional men in adjacent pews, although he had not a cent to

put on the plate. But he had what some of the silver-haired men about him would have given thousands to possess:—youth, perfect health, and a keen appreciation of whatever good things came in his way, that made life almost a rapture in favorable moments. With these, and a wise friend like Mrs. Kent, and a foothold under the flag of freedom, the possibilities for him, lying between the present time and three-score years, might be surprising.

The sermon, the first he ever listened to, was a source of wonder to him. To see one man do all the talking, and that in such a fearless way, struck him as peculiar. He easily recognized preachers on the street by their garb partly, and also by that indescribable air which the dullest may observe and the cleverest fail to satisfactorily explain; but hitherto he had a very indistinct idea as to the work they performed. A thrill went through him as he thought of Mrs. Kent's remark. If only he could stand one day before a mass of human beings and talk so fearlessly to them, how proud he would be! He grew so absorbed in these pleasing reflections that he paid no attention to the minister's words, only conscious of a musical, well modu-

lated voice filling the silent spaces of the great church. Besides, there was so much to look at that had a comforting effect on the senses. Beautiful women with uplifted, reverent faces, some of whom might have passed, with slightly altered attires, for Raphael's or Michael Angelo's angels, were grouped with gracious effect in the subdued light. Aged women, too, with faces not less angelic to the boy's pleased fancy, were listening intently to the minister's words. To him it seemed exceedingly fitting that they should pay such earnest heed, since they were so soon to be summoned to that country for which people ostensibly came to church to make ready. The sermon was short. The minister, an original thinker, believed in condensing his thoughts, and not so fully to explain his meanings as to leave his hearers no mental effort to maintain. At the close he expected the people to do some of the work too. Without dismissing them, and with scarce a dozen tired or restless ones leaving, the men and women took up the service themselves, speaking and singing, with an occasional silent hush that to Jack seemed more solemn than either. Mrs. Kent was one of the last to speak. She arose timidly.

Jack could see that she was quivering, and wondered, when it was such a painful task, that she did so at all. Her voice was low, but so well modulated and clear that persons on the other side of the church seemed to be listening. As for Jack, he experienced an entirely new and strange sensation, that caused him to wink very energetically, and tried to swallow away a very uncomfortable lump in his throat; but his utmost efforts at self-control could not restrain the tears, and his pocket being innocent of a handkerchief, he was compelled to let the drops fall unattended to, save by an occasional dexterous use of his fingers. On their way home, unconscious that he was making use of flattery, he said very seriously:—

"I liked the preacher first-rate; but you can beat him all holler. My step-mother, no matter how hard she might try, couldn't make me cry as you did."

Mrs. Kent made no reply. Such remarks were as painful to her as they might have been to the preacher, had he heard them. Jack, however, proceeded with his criticism.

"I think you might earn a lot of money if you were a preacher. Seems to me its not hardly fair

for women not to have a chance too, specially when they can do better'n the men."

"The Salvation Army and Quakers would suit you. They make no distinction between the sexes; but it would take me a long time to believe with them. I find it painful speaking a few words. To lead a meeting would be terrible."

"When it is such hard work, what makes you do it?"

"To answer your question perfectly, I must go back a great many centuries. Christ left the presence and fellowship of the Father and Spirit, the adoration of the glorious angels and His very glorious throne in Heaven to die for you and me. If I refuse to own Him as my friend and Saviour, to recommend Him to others, is it not selfish,—horridly, wickedly selfish on my part?"

"I should say it was; but I never knew much about what you say. I didn't know anything about Jesus Christ, only to swear by."

"Oh, Jack, can it be possible that any one in a Christian land, as old as you are, should be so ignorant?"

"Who was to tell me? Any way, there's lots around that knows no more'n me."

As plainly as possible Mrs. Kent rehearsed the old, old story of the manger and cross, the resurrection and ascension into glory, as they stood under the silent stars at her gate.

"There's lots of fellows who'd like to hear you tell them things. You'd do more good 'n a preacher,—leastways, some preachers. I never rightly know'd, what was the good of 'em before to-night."

Mrs. Kent stood busily thinking over a plan Jack's words suggested.

"If we had a room I would meet all you could bring every Sunday afternoon. That is the only time I can really call my own."

"In the summer-time that little house there in your garden would be prime. I could stop any leaks that would let in wet on rainy Sundays."

"But the warm weather won't last many weeks longer. The first week in September is already gone."

Jack was puzzled for a moment, but a happy thought came. "We might hold our meetings while the weather was fit. The boys could learn a lot by that time. Why, my head feels fuller 'n it ever did, and I've only had one Sunday. Seems to me in a few weeks I could preach myself, if I

kept right on." He spoke with a confidence that was convincing to himself, although Mrs. Kent smiled under cover of the night. She appointed another consultation with Jack, and then said good-night. Jack watched until he saw her light shining brightly, and then with a quite strange and new feeling of unrest and growth, he turned his face homeward, never before feeling quite such a dislike for the untidy house and brawling step-mother, and wondering why he could not have been sent to Mrs. Kent for mother love and care. Surely a fellow with such slim chances could not be expected to do as well as one like Paul Kent or that Everett lad, he mused a little sullenly. He slipped into the Carver tenement very quietly, and so much earlier than usual that his step-mother inquired if he had been chased by the police. He assured her very civilly that he had not been in any such danger, and then hastened to the bunk filled with straw that formed his couch.

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSION-SCHOOL.

WITH her intense, studious nature, Mildred gradually became so absorbed in her studies and the new world of unexplored mystery opening before her, that the old, childish fancies grew dim. She soon became a favorite with the teachers. Trained to obedience from babyhood, she gave no trouble by the insubordination that characterized most of the pupils, while the eagerness with which she plunged into her studies needed rather to be restrained than incited, as was usually the case. The work most congenial of all was the drawing-lesson, given three times a week by a very competent lady teacher. After she had got well fitted out with materials to work with, and

obtained some knowledge of lines and shading, she soon became famous in the class for her freehand sketches of faces and figures. Before her first year at the school was completed, she had so far advanced in the art as to earn a few cents now and then from her schoolmates, who were very eager to sit for their portraits, after first arranging very particularly as to the size of the picture, the price, and the pose of the figure. Beth and Connie constituted themselves her agents, usually, in fixing the price. She had first painted Connie, making a highly idealized portrait, and giving her an expression far more *spirituelle* than the poor child could ever expect to attain, unless it might be after the resurrection. When Beth's was completed, her father was so pleased with it that he had it framed and hung in his own room, but only sent the poor little artist a crumpled dollar-bill in payment. But as this was about ten times her usual price, fifty millions added to Vanderbilt's huge pile would scarcely give him the keen, tingling ecstasy Mildred felt as she folded it in her hand, and then, for greater security, tied it in a corner of her pocket-handkerchief. All through the tiresome school-hours she kept forgetting her lessons, as she

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planned how it was to be spent. But as she walked home from school, she finally decided to give it to her mother without reservation. It would be the first-fruits of her labors, like the first-fruits of the soil among her ancient Israelitish heroes, which were given direct to God. She grieved to think the possibility for such offerings had passed away with that long-vanished dispensation. As she talked the matter over with her mother, however, she discovered that our privileges in that respect were never greater in any age of the world than the present.

"Shall I give it to the mission-school then? It would buy a great many tracts."

"We have more tracts now than we can get readers for. They are so cheap every one seems anxious to provide them."

"What shall I buy with it then?" Mildred asked, in a worried sort of way. Already she was beginning to realize the perplexities wealth brings.

"You need not be in a hurry to spend it. The right way will present itself if we wait patiently."

"But I want it to be doing good now. Some one that it might help to be good may die if we wait long."

"I wish all Christian capitalists were as eager as you to have their dollars consecrated. I would not be obliged so frequently to look at the pinched faces and half-clad bodies of my mission-class; neither would our poor earth carry such a load of sin and misery on its pathway amid the suns and galaxies,—perhaps the only sin-cursed orb among them all." The mother looked out wearily toward the dimming sky, where Jupiter and his brothers and sisters were taking their places in the far depths of space. Her efforts to help Jack Carver had resulted in a wider scheme than she had anticipated. The summer-house had first been used as a place of meeting. Only one lad ventured with Jack at first. He was surprised at his lack of success in getting them to come; but when there were two to go together among their comrades and tell how interesting the school was, and what a kind teacher they had, a few smaller lads came dropping in to see for themselves; and by-and-by the girls came too; so that before very long the summer-house became not only too chilly, but too small to seat them comfortably. Mildred very plaintively confided to her friend, the rector of St. Malachi's, the strait they were in, at one of their week-

ly hand-shakings, when he eagerly asked her all about it, and then promised to call and talk the matter over with her mother.

"But you see, mamma," she explained ruefully, "it is not likely he will ever think of it again. You know he promised to get me affirmed and has never done it."

"You mean *confirmed*."

"Well, it was some such word; I really could not see any sense in it."

"But this is much more important than Confirmation, and you can speak to him about it again next Sunday."

Mildred was saved the task, for on Monday afternoon the gentle rector came knocking at Mrs. Kent's door. They had a long conversation; for a time Mr. Felton forgot his dislike of listening to women's advice in matters parochial, while Mrs. Kent, still holding her work in her hand, and sewing diligently, told him of her mission-class, and how it had grown from a solitary lad to a score of boys and girls, with immortal souls, but possessed of nothing else worth mentioning. How they had come through rain and cold from Sunday to Sunday, like so many hungry lambs to be fed.

"My heart aches often while I talk to them," she remarked sadly, "of Christ and Heaven and the beautiful life those have who reach there; for many of them can scarcely understand the meaning of joy and beauty, their lives are so cramped and wretched."

"Do you have rewards for them in the shape of pictures or story-books?"

"I cannot afford anything of the kind; besides, they do not expect it. They do not need to be hired to come," she said with a smile.

Mr. Felton looked at her with much wonder and considerable admiration. His experience with children in mission-schools was not so satisfactory. He had found it difficult to keep them with such rewards as pictures and cards and unlimited supplies of cheap reading-matter, nothing short of monthly teas and country excursions really keeping them true to the school.

He said at last: "St. Malachi's is a small congregation, but we have a number of persons possessed of considerable means. If we can get them interested in your school it would be an excellent thing; but I am not clever at getting to their pockets. I would rather give the money myself

when I have it, than appeal to my parishioners for aid." He looked down rather helplessly at his thin, folded hands, while his face, so refined and gentle, impressed Mrs. Kent as strangely pathetic in repose. While speaking, his hazel eyes grew luminous and his whole expression became animated. She could easily recognize in him a shrinking, sensitive soul, ill fitted to endure the roughness of life. She saw that he was unpractical, but eager to serve his generation; and though sorely discouraged by his failures and shattered ideals, he was not willing to give up trying. Sitting there in the prolonged silence that seemed quite natural, she thought over again the mixed problems of life; some always on the crest of the billows, triumphantly looking down on their fellows buffeting with the ground-swell or caught with the outgoing tide. If the successes could only be a little more equalized, or if one's fellows were not so eager to cheer the one throned on the crest of the wave and look with pitying contempt on those wrestling with the breakers or caught in the undertow. But she grew happier as she reflected that the only One who comprehends all the perplexed meanings will at last distribute the rewards that endure eternally.

Mr. Felton's brown study was so profound that he was startled at last by Mrs. Kent's very practical remark: "We do not need money or anything else very much, except a few cheap bibles and some picture-papers; but what we must have, if we continue the class, is a room easily warmed and with a few seats."

"Really, is that all? Why the school-room of St. Malachi's will be a capital place. Maybe we could get the poor things to come to church. Twenty of them would swell our congregation finely." The folded hands clasped each other more tightly, as if congratulating each other.

"I will stipulate with them that their attendance at school will be conditional on being at church once on the Sabbath, in return for your goodness in providing a room. Mildred has described your church very minutely, and from her I have learned that there was a large gallery with scarcely any one occupying it. They might sit there."

"I wish I had you for a vestry-man," the gentle preacher said, with much enthusiasm. "I think I could get my church filled."

Mrs. Kent's face, as a rule, did not brighten at compliments; for she scarcely had a woman's usual

fondness for such cheap currency. But just now, a ripple of fun, like sunlight over a field of flowers, passed over her eyes and lips. "What would Mr. Felton's vestry-men say if they should hear their rector's remark?"

Before he took his leave all the arrangements were made for the change of school-rooms; and as he wended his way to his lodging, the good man felt richer by at least a score of additional hearers. Mrs. Kent, with Jack Carver's help, announced to the children the change of school-rooms, while the former waited with some anxiety to see if they would flock as eagerly to the church as to her summer-house. When the hour came on the Sabbath afternoon, she was promptly on the spot; but Mr. Felton was before her. In gown and bands he was standing at the vestry door, waiting with beaming countenance to welcome teacher and children.

"I have caught a glimpse, now and then, of a child; but they vanish mysteriously before I can speak to them," he said, shading his near-sighted eyes with his hands.

Mrs. Kent peeped out also just in time to see Jack Carver dodge behind a tomb-stone, while one

or two others scuttled out of sight behind a huge monument that served excellently for a game of hide and seek, and from which they seemed to be watching the worthy rector on the sly.

"I think I would get them to come in if you would go inside for a few moments. They feel a little shy, probably."

Mr. Felton immediately withdrew, while Mrs. Kent went out to reconnoitre.

"Come here, Jack," she called, when Jack incautiously put his head out of range of his tombstone. Seeing she was alone, he boldly stepped out, followed from one grave-shelter after another by nearly her whole flock.

"Why were you hiding?" she asked.

"We saw that great big body in there, and weren't sure if 'twas a man or what. Jack thought we'd best wait till you came."

"Why Jack! surely you were not afraid."

Jack's face flushed and his eyes fell, but he made no reply. The truth was, all the street vagabondage had not slipped from him yet, and he thought it a good lark to frighten the children and bother the rector. The scattered flock were soon all gathered at the vestry-door save one.

"Betsy Jones is out in the street and says she ain't coming in," Jack informed Mrs. Kent just before they entered.

"What is the reason?"

"Her folks don't want her to come among the 'Piscopals.'"

Mrs. Kent went to where the girl was peeping rather curiously at them through the fence.

"Why don't you come in with us?" she asked.

"Father don't hold to sprinklin' babies, and they do that in there."

"You will do worse things than that if you stay on the street as your custom has been. Besides we do not intend baptizing any of the mission-class. That is not what we meet for."

"I don't care. Father says its papist work anyway, and he'd rather not have me mix up with such." She gave her head a disdainful toss. But Mrs. Kent, although provoked, felt sorry for the poor, ignorant girl, whose training at home was worse even than what she got on the street. She was quick to learn, bold and self-reliant, with unlimited confidence in her own ability. Possessed of a strong voice and correct ear, she often led the singing,

and was, in fact, the ruling spirit in the school. There was, just now, on her round, plump face a mixed expression. She enjoyed the influence she had gained over her classmates, and had a natural regret at losing her power; but there was also satisfaction in acting spitefully; for with all her cleverness, this was her ruling characteristic. Her small nose, looking smaller still on her large, round face, was turning up disdainfully, and the deep blue eyes were snapping venomously, as she stood waiting for Mrs. Kent to speak. Repressing the desire to reprove her sharply and send her home, she leaned over the fence, laying her hand tenderly on the girl's cheek. "I am sorry to lose you, Betsy, for your own sake. If you go home and tell your father that I teach you nothing but what every branch of the Protestant church, no matter how bigoted they may be, fully believes, he may give his consent for you to come back."

"I'll come if he's willing or not, if I want to," she said, in a quite subdued way.

"You must go home first and get his consent before I can allow you to come in," Mrs. Kent said firmly.

Betsy gave her head another toss, and started up

the street for their alley at a steady trot. She could rule her father easily, and would soon compel his consent; but some time ago she found that Mrs. Kent was quite beyond her control. Turning back to the church, Mrs. Kent led the children through to the school-room. At considerable expense and much personal labor, the rector had done his best to make it attractive to the children; and his efforts were fully appreciated.

"My, but isn't this a jolly place!" Jack said admiringly, as he dropped into a cushioned seat and rolled his eyes around at the bright pictures on the walls, and sweet-smelling flowers in generous bouquets on the cabinet-organ, stand, and various other spots.

"I wish they'd keep us till supper-time," one blue, hungry-looking little fellow said.

"I'd like to stay always if they'd give us victuals and a bed," another responded heartily.

"Our house smokes fearful. I wonder if they'd let me come here and stay when I'm not selling papers, it's so warm," another, with red eyes and smoky appearance generally, said wistfully.

"You bet they won't! Churches ain't lodging-houses," was the quick reply from another.

"I wish they was. What's the use of having them shut up all the week doing nobody any good, and us living in the smoke, like so many herrings."

Jack Carver, who had been listening to the conversation, thought the boy's argument was quite reasonable. The fitness of things was still dimly perceptible to his untutored mind. But after all, were not human beings better than brick and wood and cushioned seats? He grew absorbed over one of these perplexing problems that older and wiser heads have found too difficult to solve, and was only recalled to present surroundings by the delicious strains Mrs. Kent was drawing from the organ, and the majestic appearance of Mr. Felton sailing down upon them in priestly robes. The smaller children looked frightened, and were glancing toward the open door; but Mrs. Kent turned around reassuringly, and beckoned them to her side. Jack led the way, and presently a score of voices—some sweetly harmonious, others equally discordant—were singing the hymn of praise. Mr. Felton, with a most peaceful face, was listening near, while visions of white-robed catechumens kneeling for the bishop's blessing flitted before his

eyes. Presently a round, rosy face was flitting in reality before his pensive gaze, in the door-way. Betsy Jones, hot and breathless, had returned; but the priestly-looking figure, sitting with closed eyes, arrested her steps. But he saw her presently, and came towards her. She fled behind a monument, leaving him standing in the door-way, perplexed at the way the children so mysteriously disappeared at sight of him. He reflected with much satisfaction that the little Kents were always anxious to be with him; and he resolved to reward their confidence, in the future, with some suitable gift.

The school proceeded as usual, Betsy Jones slipping into her place when a favorable opportunity presented itself by Mr. Felton withdrawing himself from the vicinity of the door-way. When the lessons were ended, to which the rector listened as attentively and even more appreciatively than the class, Mrs. Kent gave him the opportunity, promised before, to address them. But they grew so restless, and regarded the door so longingly, that he only recited about one quarter of the address which he had prepared with considerable care. He wondered why it was they listened so attentively to what Mrs. Kent had to say; it cer-

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tainly was far simpler than his address, but still it was more interesting to the children. He decided to pay strict heed to her remarks after this, himself, — possibly he might get some useful hints that would help him in gaining the ear of his own flock ; for what drew the attention of children was pretty sure to please beings of a larger growth.

But what his words failed to do, the gift of a pretty picture-book to each individual of the flock, as they filed past him on their way to the door, did most assuredly do, and they went to their homes full of the praises of the kindly rector of St. Malachi's.

CHAPTER XI.

MURMURINGS.

MRS. KENT left Mildred at home the following Sabbath morning to keep house while she went to St. Malachi's to help direct the devotions of her flock, who had all promised to be there. With one or two exceptions they were true to their word; even Betsy Jones so far overcoming her father's doctrinal scruples as to get a grudging consent to come with the rest. The usual worshippers regarded with much curiosity and considerable interest the queer-looking crowd surveying them from the gallery with equally curious stare. The refined, well-dressed lady, who held them in such thorough control, was the greatest surprise of all. Mr. Felton

had provided an abundance of prayer-books; but Mrs. Kent was not too well posted herself in finding the places, so that the whole service, save the sermon, was a bewildered hurrying over leaves on the part of those who could read, to find the right place. Jack Carver ensconced himself in a corner and read serenely on, wisely reflecting that one part must be as good as another, relaxing his attention at intervals to watch his companions' excited chase, or calmly surveying the worshippers below, who seemed to have a thorough understanding of the book, and were making devout responses as the preacher read over the prayers. Jack concluded they must be an extra good lot of Christians,—much superior to the worshippers at Grace Church, where he was now a regular attendant. It was his custom there to listen to the prayers with his eyes open to see what was going on. He usually saw many others similarly engaged. The sermon was short, but still long enough to satisfy the restless crowd of waifs not accustomed to self-control or inaction.

Mrs. Kent continued coming for a few Sundays, and then exacting a promise of good behavior from each of them she allowed Mildred and Paul to go in her stead.

The mission-children were overcoming the mysteries of the prayer-book, and their eagerness to make the responses kept them so busy during that part of the service, that they behaved with considerable propriety. And so the Sundays had gone around until Christmas. No mention had been made of rewards; but some of the children nevertheless expected the kind-hearted rector would specially remember them then. As he had something for them now every Sunday, surely at Christmas time the present would be different both in kind and degree. They sincerely hoped it might not be something to read, as they reckoned their minds were getting better fed of late than their bodies. Usually they were on hand before either Mr. Felton or their teacher; the school-room was beautifully warm and inviting, while there were always fresh flowers—of late mostly those which had little or no perfume, and rather destitute of color. But green leaves alone had a charm for these flower-stinted children. Jack Carver felt too much of a man to express a wish for Christmas gifts; but he was an interested listener while the others discussed the subject. Betsy Jones held steadily to the concertina, Tom-

my Tufts to a pair of long boots, and others to whatever they could get. The Sunday before Christmas, conversation on the matter reached a climax. Jack was first at the vestry door. As he opened it and entered, the delicious woodsy smell of spruce and hemlock greeted him, festooned gracefully from ceiling and window-cornice. The place looked a perfect bower.

"Oh, my!" he ejaculated. Any stronger expression he felt would be out of place in a church. Then he seated himself comfortably, to await with much satisfaction the surprise of his classmates. They came dropping in one after another, and all crowded around him.

"Guess if we ain't going to have a time after all. S'pose they'd go to all this trouble jest for Sunday-school?" Betsy Jones remarked with great complacency.

"Maybe they won't give us any other treat than this," one girl said despondently.

"Well, if it is all, I say they'd a sight better saved their strength and got us something good to eat. Poor folks can't be expected to admire things on an empty stomach," Betsy replied discontentedly.

"I'd advise you to take what you can get and be thankful. I s'pose they're not under special obligations to us beggars," Jack said coolly.

"What do they coax us to come here for? I declare if some of us haven't come every Sunday through rain and shine."

"I expect you get the benefit of it yourself. I guess Mrs. Kent would just as soon stay at home with them pretty little folks of hers as come here with this crowd. Then that good old parson heats up his church every Sunday, and he's always here. And see the books and cards he's given us."

"I'm sick of cards and nosegays. If they'd give us something useful, it 'ud be a sight sensibler."

"Well, Betsy, all I can say is, if you are so unthankful for what you get here, you'd better go some place where they'd do better by you."

"You just shut up, Jack Carver, I've as good a right here as you, for all you're so masterful, and put on airs as if you run the consarn."

The others stood around so interested in their grievances as rehearsed by Betsy that they neglected to be happy in the beautiful, warm room. The soft rustle of Mrs. Kent's drapery, as she drew near, caught Jack's attention, but he made

no sign. She had expected to hear exclamations of delight, but instead she heard the discontented utterances of Betsy Jones and the others. For a moment she was tempted to leave them altogether, but a good angel at her side,—the same who helped the old martyrs in centuries long since dead, to fight for the truth—held her, until patience and principle overcame the elementary passion of revenge at their ingratitude. And then, with face nearly as unruffled as usual, she stood in their midst.

"I have heard what you were saying, and have been tempted to leave you altogether. Could you be surprised if I did so?"

"No mum, I 'spect not," a freckled-faced urchin with red hair and upturned nose, answering to the well-known name of Billy Smith, answered promptly. Mrs. Kent's rather stern face relaxed into a genuine smile; then turning, she laid her soft, ungloved hand on Jack's curly head and said: "I am glad there was one to defend Mr. Felton and myself. We have, at considerable sacrifice, tried to prepare a nice Christmas for you, hoping to bring to your mind more clearly the blessed Christ-child whose birthday we celebrate. How many of you have

thanked Mr. Felton for his goodness to you? Or do you expect to receive all the gifts without any recompense whatever?"

Betsy Jones' round eyes twinkled as if new ideas were getting forced into her pugnacious head, while the others looked more or less shamefaced.

"I didn't just remember the parson," Jack said, with a look of regret, "but I've done my best to show I hadn't forgot what you've done for me." He twisted around to the seat behind him and taking up a brown paper parcel handed it to Mrs. Kent.

"Is this for me, Jack?" she said with a good deal of surprise.

"Yes 'm," he responded with unusual bashfulness.

She unrolled the paper, standing there with some two-score eyes watching her very intently, Tommy Tuffts looking at her crosswise, his eyes having an unfortunate cast.

"What a handsome gift for you to select," she said, with a look of real admiration as she folded the pure white wrap of fleecy wool about her shoulders. "It was just what I needed."

"I thought first I'd get a book, but you have

such lots of them, and they're not much comfort once you've read them."

"If I escape my usual attack of bronchitis this winter, you shall get the credit of it."

The young people took their seats around the organ much more humbly than usual. They realized for the first time that the grace of generosity was not the exclusive privilege of Mrs. Kent and Mr. Felton. Mrs. Kent selected for that day's lesson the story of the birth in Bethlehem; on the earthward side attended with so little display, but on the heavenly side angels passing to and fro in glorious and amazed delight, and a strange, new star suddenly springing into its high position among sister worlds and suns. Betsy Jones especially listened with a look of conscious self-reproach on her face, as Mrs. Kent applied the story of Christ's great benevolence and forgetfulness in taking, as a lesson to men of all ages, a life of poverty, while enriching the human race as only God could.

"It should teach us all, even the youngest," Mrs. Kent continued, "a lesson always to be remembered. He had not where to lay his head; and yet, forgetful of his own necessities, He left

His trade and His mother's roof, and went up and down the hills of Judea and Galilee, and even to the Samaritans, their national enemies, healing both body and soul, comforting the broken-hearted, creating food for thousands of hungry ones, yet neglecting to do so for himself during long days and weeks of fasting in desert solitudes. Now I want my class to learn this glorious art of forgetting self, and to try and imitate the blessed Jesus. Each of you can do something for others, and do not let your spirits get soured looking for gifts, and repining if they are not bestowed. Rather try to belong to the world's givers; to be like God himself, since he so graciously invites us to be so."

When Mr. Felton opened his book to read the closing prayer, a glance around her class assured Mrs. Kent that they had quite new ideas, and would probably the more gratefully receive the announcement he would make after the benediction.

The pause after the final amen was very short. The good man took a childish delight in this festival which, with much cost of money and labor, he had got in readiness for his scrubby-looking young parishioners.

"To-morrow evening," he said, "we want all of you to come to this church at five o'clock precisely. Each of you may bring a brother or sister; and if these are not available, get your favorite companion to come. Now remember, we shall be prepared for just forty altogether. There will be a tea, with sweet bread and turkey and other meats and good things in abundance; and after this a Christmas-tree, when we expect to remember each one of you."

The kindly face beamed on them so pleasantly that Tommy Tufts, whose sight may have been defective, whispered to his companion next him, "Don't he look like an angel?"

"Angels hain't got no whiskers," the other replied contemptuously. Tommy was used to having his remarks so treated. Hence his pleasure was not marred.

Betsy Jones's face was a study just then, and she slipped out more humbly than ever before.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. FELTON'S TEA-PARTY.

IT would be a difficult task to describe the enjoyment that fell to the lot of each member of the mission-class at that Christmas tea-party. For the first time in their presence Mr. Felton walked about among them in common clothes, like any other human being, carrying plates of cake and sandwiches, roast turkey and goose, with hot vegetables and other good things in great variety and abundance; for it was no cold charity meats that he offered his youthful guests. He had postponed his own Christmas dinner in order to eat with them. A good part of the feminine force of St. Malachi's had caught, to some extent, their rector's enthusiasm in the matter, and were present

as helpers on this notable occasion. The children's faces shone from the combined effects of great good humor, and a plentiful application of soap and water. Jack Carver was having the dullest time of any. His little step-sister, Adelphine, was in such a hysterical condition he got very poor satisfaction out of his slice of roast beef and generous helping of turkey. Mrs. Kent saw his trouble, and went to his assistance. Fortifying herself first with a red-cheeked doll, dressed in tarleton, with pink ribbons, she went to her. Adelphine was pleased with it, and insisted on having it in her own hands.

"Come to me," Mrs. Kent said, "while Jack takes his tea, and you shall have the dollie to take home." But the spoiled child wanted Jack and the doll too.

"I think she would be quiet if she could hold it herself. She is generally crying; so I won't mind that, if only she wouldn't scream so," Jack said looking as wistfully at the doll as Adelphine herself. Mrs. Kent did as Jack requested, and handed over the doll to Adelphine's care, who directly became so absorbed in examining into its construction that Jack was nearly through with

his pie and cake when a doleful wail startled the entire table.

"Her insides is comin' out," Adelphine shrieked hysterically, flinging the doll on Jack's plate and giving herself over to cries and tears. Jack tried to hush her, his own face crimsoning at the disturbance she was creating, and hastily swallowing the remainder of his feast he picked her up and started for the door. Mrs. Kent followed him to the door with the doll, whose insides she was securing.

"Where are you going?" she asked him.

"To take this weeper home. I thought she'd stop for once; and to please her mother I brought her."

"I want to go home," she cried, viciously trying to bite Jack.

He cast a despairing glance at Mrs. Kent. "It's only her way; she won't do any better if I let her stay."

Mrs. Kent followed them out, and getting the child's wraps assisted Jack in the difficult task of getting her into them and out of the house.

"You will be back immediately," she asked.

"Yes," he responded briefly, and then disap-

peared in the darkness, Adelphine screaming and biting as they went.

The children were a long time getting through; the more alert of them in the act of eating getting a little further appetite while waiting for the slower ones, so that it was nearly an hour before the last nut was cracked and raisin swallowed. Then they regarded the remaining good things, of which there was still a plentiful supply on the table, with a mixture of regret and loathing. It was the first time with most of them that frosted cake and lemon-pie ceased to be desirable.

The tables were speedily cleared, and the remainder of the food arranged in forty separate parcels for the final distribution—a last surprise for the children.

After this the tree was unveiled,—when the tiny candles brightly burning, rosy apples, oranges, bags of confectionery, and other articles not quite so perishable hanging there in all their beauty, provoked an uncontrollable exclamation of wonder and joy. Mr. Felton would not allow the deception of a make-believe Santa Claus, and carried around the gifts himself as each child's name was announced. To the latter it seemed as if their

very thoughts had been read. Betsy Jones got a concertina — a second-hand one, but still with a great deal of latent music stored away in its lungs; and Tommy Tuffts a pair of long boots, and the others gifts that gave corresponding satisfaction for the most part. The twenty invited guests received each an apple, orange, and bag of confectionery.

"I mean to come every Sunday after this," was the whispered assurance heard from every little visitor; while Mr. Felton's face beamed with increasing satisfaction at the probable enlargement of his flock. Jack got back, hot and breathless, before his name was called; but as that took place twice before the tree was stripped, his satisfaction was doubled. Both Mr. Felton and Mrs. Kent had remembered him, since but for him, the mission-school would probably not have been started. Then he had made himself so useful in hunting up recruits and controlling the more wayward of those outside of the school on the Sabbath-day, that he was reckoned nearly equal to themselves. Mr. Felton's gift was a package of second-hand books; he had heard of Jack's unusual thirst for book-knowledge. Mrs. Kent had improvised him a handsome overcoat from one stored away in her

own clothes-presses. Betsy Jones's face clouded for an instant at Jack's double supply, but the shadow soon vanished after they had begun singing their Christmas hymns, as she, forgetting to sing with the rest, found that now and then with her concertina she could catch a stray chord of the air they sang. Of course she drew out plenty of discordant strains; but Betsy was in no wise discomposed by this. To find her own enjoyment was the principal business of her life. A very thankful and satisfied crowd of young creatures they all were when the last surprise of the evening arrived. A neatly folded and good-sized package of cakes and cold fowl and beef was placed in each willing hand as they filed out of the vestry door into the chill Christmas air, with their faces turned homeward—so ending the first really bright Christmas day for the most of them.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VERY WELCOME VISITOR.

MILDRED'S dollar had found its place in helping to buy Tommy Tuffts' boots. She did not voice her disappointment in seeing it so applied; but still she could not well reconcile first-fruits such as the Bible described and long boots for ragged, cross-eyed children. But as her mother accepted her offering and decided so to spend it, Mildred tried to hope that in some mysterious fashion God would accept it as if given to Himself. For the most part her holiday season had been spent in taking care of the children and keeping house for her mother. The latter had been so pressed with work — her unusual artistic taste in draperies and costumes

generally kept her at that festive season busy, very often, far into the night,—while a hurried moment was snatched whenever possible to help Mr. Felton and the other workers at St. Malachi's, in getting the tea and Christmas-tree ready for the mission-class. Beth and Connie sometimes came around when no better amusement presented itself; but they, too, had their engagements for Christmas parties; and their succeeding days of ennui and headache as a result of such junketings and injudicious feasting. They dimly realized that an afternoon with the Kent children in their school-frocks, with a plain tea, was a good deal pleasanter to review from the following morning's first awakening than a fancy party with the rich food and gay dresses. Still, they looked forward with feverish delight to these parties, always expecting to find the perfect happiness that had hitherto unfortunately eluded them. They described to the Kents how they ate and played and comported themselves generally; to all of which the three listened with varying sensations. Paul, with his fine appetite, decided that the supper-room was the centre of attraction; Grace liked best to hear about the games and the music; while Mildred

tried to picture the beautiful rooms and brightly dressed children flitting about the rooms, amid mirrors and pictures and other interesting objects generally, that Beth and Connie must surely have looked upon, but seemed so incapable of describing. They would sit and listen quite as attentively and with as eager interest as Paul and Grace, while Mildred went over that rare visit to Grassmere and all she saw there, but which, alas, had never been repeated.

Douglass had gone off to Europe quite unexpectedly with his mother, and had now only just returned; and the hope was cherished that another invitation might be extended after his return to school. Beth used to wonder why Mildred's description of that visit was so much more interesting than any that she and Connie could give of their elaborate parties. Indeed, to sit and listen while Mildred went over for the hundred and first time, how she halted on the steps and stood frightened amid the grandeur, the still figures standing unclothed amid the fountains and flowers, the row on the blue lake, when heaven seemed so near, was fast becoming to all of them like Andersen's Fairy Stories. But one day, when the holidays

were nearly ended and Paul and Gracie had become convinced, almost, that somewhere they had folded away safely all sorts of precious things, gifts from Santa Claus, and were actually having a most enjoyable Christmas-tide filled with merry sleigh-rides and grand dinners, and all sorts of exquisite things that existed only in Mildred's imagination, there came a "new foot to the door."

The quaintly fashioned sleigh that Grace, with amazed glance, first saw, and half fearfully looked at long enough to see the horse with head tossed high in air, glossy fur robes, and a man in livery standing beside it, made her race to the kitchen with the startling news for Mildred to come and look too.

"He's come, Santa Claus himself! His sleigh is at the gate, and I hear him knocking at the door," she cried, in great excitement.

Mildred looked alarmed, and hesitated a moment; then bravely nerving herself for the encounter with man or fairy, or whoever it might be, she went to the door, with the children tiptoeing behind her at a safe distance. The snow was drifting down silently, so that the garden-path was effectually concealed; but glancing hastily through the window she saw

footsteps in the snow. Her face was pale, but sternly resolute, as she threw open the door. Her heart gave a sudden, terrified pulsation at sight of the snowy figure robed in the glossy seal-skin coat, with the snow clinging to cap and hair. The figure was standing with his back to the door, but turned around directly, and doffing his cap, the handsome, boyish face of Douglass Everett confronted her, instead of the rubicund and not over beautiful visage of St. Nicholas, if his portraits are even the faintest likenesses to himself.

"I am *so* glad to see you," she exclaimed, with a sudden lighting of the pale little face and with a vivid rush of blood over neck and brow.

"You looked so frightened, you must have mistaken me for a robber."

"Oh, no! but Gracie saw your horses first, and she told me it was Santa Claus," she responded with all seriousness. "But won't you come in?" Douglass looked ruefully at his snowy garments.

"If you will let me come to the kitchen I would like to stay a while with you."

"We will be glad to have you come in and sit just where you like," she said, with a cordiality that assured Douglass of his welcome.

"These little chaps may take me instead of Santa Claus. I will first go back to the sleigh for some things I have there." He sprang down through the drifted walk to the gate, while the children stood watching with eager, admiring eyes.

"Is he really Santa Claus?" Grace asked.

"He is better than Santa Claus. Douglass and Grassmere," she murmured, her voice dwelling on the words lovingly. Meanwhile she watched him gathering an armful of packages out of the sleigh. When he started for the house he told the man to drive home; that he would walk out when he was ready to go.

The horses started off at a brisk canter, the sleigh-bells jingling merrily. Paul stood watching Douglass wading through the deep snow.

"If I had my long boots I would go and meet him," he said, with effusive hospitality.

"Where are your boots?" Douglass asked, letting fall his parcels on the floor, and, catching Paul by the shoulders, looked down affectionately into the little round face.

"Mildred says they're growing somewhere, just like the boards for my coffin; but I'd rather have the boots."

"I fully sympathize with you in that wish. Long boots are more suitable than coffins to wade about in the Christmas snow."

"But I can't wade about," Paul said regretfully. "My boots are only shoes. If I had been a mission-school boy, now, I might have got long boots too, on the Christmas-tree, like Tommy Tuffts; but he squints, and Mildred says on that account he ought to get more things than I."

Douglass followed Mildred to the kitchen. A bright fire was cheerily burning, and things looked so home-like and comfortable he concluded it was perfectly jolly to live in a little nest of a cottage.

He took off his cap and coat, and sat down in the easy-chair Mildred placed for him by the stove, while Paul leaned on the arm of the chair, looking up into the handsome face with hungry, admiring glances. It seemed so good to be near a great boy like this who could wade in the deep snow and play with guns and horses. Little girls weren't much better now in Paul's estimation than rag-babies. Grace stood some distance off, watching him shyly through her curtain of curls. Douglass smiled down into Paul's eloquent face, and then turned to Mildred.

"Have you had good times at school?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I am learning to draw."

"She got a whole dollar once for making Beth Lee on paper, and she gave every cent of it to the mission-children for first-fruits; it went towards Tommy Tufts' boots."

"What kind of fruit is that?" Douglass asked curiously. In all his wide experience of edibles he had never heard of that variety. Mildred's face colored, but she explained to her visitor the history of the name and its purpose.

"Ah, yes, I remember; but if I thought about it at all, I reckoned the custom had gone out of fashion along with the slaughter of kine and other sacrificial rites of the Jewish service."

"There are some things that ought never to go out of fashion," Mildred timidly hazarded the suggestion.

"There are a few things that never do," Douglass responded. "Getting married and dying, and other customs one would like to see go out with the out of last year's garments."

"I think it would be a pity for those two to go out. A home is so much nicer with a father and

mother both; and then it's pleasant to die when one gets tired and sick, and they can go to a place prettier even than Grassmere," Mildred said, reflectively.

"Pretty homes don't always make one happy. We were visiting at a much grander place than Grassmere while we were in England, and the mistress of the house cried, generally, when she looked at me. It was a jolly place to visit, but I was glad to get away."

"I don't cry when I look at you," Paul said scornfully. "I like to see you coming. Boys are ever so much better than girls."

"Why did she cry when she looked at you?" Mildred questioned.

"She had an only son who she thought looked like me; but he was drowned while bathing in the sea. They were stopping then in Scotland, and perhaps the water was colder than what he was used to, and he took cramps. When they reached him he was quite dead. When her husband dies, their splendid castle and park and everything goes to a disagreeable young man—a distant cousin."

"But if she were in heaven, she needn't mind who was living in her castle if she had a better one;

or gathering her flowers, if she was among those that never fade."

"I am sorry to say, very few people I know have such a vivid sense of that other country as you. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' to most of them." He turned to look at Grace, who, being unobserved, had been drawing quite near.

"I think I can find a rather good-looking baby among those parcels at the door," he said, rising from the chair.

"I'll bring in the bundles!" Paul cried eagerly, surmising there might be something for himself.

Grace crept nearer, her hair put back and her large blue eyes alight with expectation.

Douglas took up a long box, and began very carefully to untie the strings. Mildred wondered at his singular economy in the matter of twine; but at last he was through, and could not well tease the eager-eyed children any longer. The cover was taken off, a fold of tissue-paper lifted, when the most beautiful vision of dollish loveliness the children ever beheld was lifted out and placed in Grace's arms. She held it for a while spell-bound, and then, going to Mildred, laid it carefully on her knee and turning to Douglas, she clasped

her arms about his neck and gave him a hearty kiss on his own red lips.

"Well done, little maiden, you have paid me in full for my gift," he said, hugging her affectionately, and returning her kiss with equal warmth. She nestled down contentedly in his arms for a few minutes, and then, slipping down, took her doll, and after that took very little interest in anything else.

Paul, in the meantime, was watching the wrapping being carefully removed from another of the parcels, which was proceeding even more slowly than in the first case; but at last Douglass handed him a good-sized box with a lock and key. He took it with a mystified air, scarce knowing what to do.

"Turn the key and the lid will rise."

"Oh, Mildred, just look here!" he cried joyously. Mildred did as commanded.

"It's tools to be a carpenter with!" Paul cried grandly. Already he felt himself nearly a man. He took them out one by one, examining each with a fine, critical air, highly becoming to a full-grown workman, but very comical in such an abbreviated specimen of humanity. Presently he began laying

them back in the box, his eye meanwhile straying furtively towards the parcels still unopened.

"You are not already tired of them?" Douglass asked.

"Oh, no! but I can look at them when you are not here," he said, very politely, trying hard not to let his eyes stray too frequently to those mysterious packages.

"I dare say you are anxious to know what these contain," Douglass said mischievously. Paul blushed, but was not adept enough in concealing his desires to deny the impeachment.

There was the same provoking economy in the matter of twins as before; while both Mildred and Paul were filled with amazement that the heir of Grassmere should be so careful of what was so nearly valueless. Careful as he was, however, he got through at last—when another box was revealed of polished rosewood and with a thick roll of papers. Douglass gave them to Mildred to open, which she did with fingers slightly tremulous. The box-cover lifted, and a vision of possible beauty lay before her in the score or more of varying tints of water-colors—not the cheap, unsatisfactory sort that she had always been tor-

tured with, but the very best manufactured. The color came and went in the rose-petaled cheek, and the weighted lids still drooped, while a nervous quivering of the lips told of her desire to speak her thanks and the impossibility to do so.

"Aren't you glad, Mildred?" Paul asked anxiously. "You look as if you wanted to cry." She brushed the tears away that Paul's words had forced to fall, and then said with a brave effort at composure: "It is because I am so glad that I can't very well thank you."

"Please don't try. I am well paid already; for I enjoyed getting the things, and now it's a pleasure to see how well you like them," he said, as if he was the one after all who was having the best of it.

"I told a great artist, who was painting my picture in Rome, about you, and he gave me some studies for you. If you are really a genius, you can go on very well alone, for a while, at all events."

"But I am not a genius; I just like to look at pictures, and want to make them."

"Well, I expect that is the way they all began. One never can tell how much capital stock they

may have until they measure their faculties. I know there are very few girls who take portraits, at least among my acquaintances," Douglass said, as he put on his coat and gloves. He shook hands with Paul in very solemn fashion; for already the wee man was assuming all the airs and dignity of six feet of humanity on the strength of his box of tools; while Gracie stood by him stroking very lovingly the rich, soft fur of his coat.

Mildred followed him to the door, bethinking herself in time to ask him to come again. "It is just like sunshine to have you come into the house, you always make us so happy," she said shyly.

"That is a very pretty compliment. You can say nice things, which is a pleasanter gift than painting pictures. Most of the artists I have met are not given to polite remarks."

Mildred watched him wistfully as he sped down the drifted garden-walk and along the street until he disappeared from sight. It was so beautiful to know real, live painters, who could first imagine and then make immortal their dreams of beauty. The shadows of night were beginning to gather as she stood watching the whirling snowflakes covering up in their fleecy embrace all unsightly things,

and making houses and fences look like pictures from fairy-land. If she could only watch them falling in the sea, or covering hillsides and farmsteads, and cattle wading knee-deep in their chill beauty, what an unsatisfied longing in her heart would be filled! She turned back at last to the dusky room. Her mother would soon be home, and the tea must be in readiness, the lamp lighted, and the home made cheerful for the dear one, after her chilly tramp through the snow from the grand mansion where she was putting the finishing touches to the dress of a *passée* beauty who longed to appear as a *débutante*; and Mrs. Kent, if any one in the city could accomplish such a miracle, was the one to do it.

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CHAPTER XIV.

DREAMS.

THE holidays ended, Mildred returned to school with fresh eagerness. With her vast supplies of water-colors she felt prepared to take a contract to supply the entire school with portraits at a dollar a head; while, a great many times, in imagination she expended the money thus earned.

In the meantime, until orders came in, she practised very diligently on Paul and Grace and the lady Ermengarde, the elegant Paris doll. The two former were growing very weary of posing, and had ceased to take much interest in their pictures as they slowly advanced under Mildred's painstaking brush. Next to her box of water-colors, the

studies Douglass had brought her from Rome were her deepest source of satisfaction. By her school-mates who knew anything of her straitened home and circumstances, her lot was regarded as an exceedingly hard one; but perhaps few of them drew from their multiplied sources of enjoyment a tithe of the genuine satisfaction which she extracted from her few. She was, like the bee, drinking to the full of her few rare flowers, and storing away in the still fastnesses of her soul rich supplies wherefrom to draw in future days; they were like the butterfly which alights on the honey-filled flower without the means or knowledge to extract its wealth of sweetness. From her limited sources of delight she managed to draw so much real and imaginary joy, it would be a very happy person indeed who could afford to bestow sympathy on her.

Douglass returned after the holidays to the Park Avenue School, which was as exclusively aristocratic as ever; and the older pupils probably regarded Mildred with the same contempt as at first; but the younger ones were very forgetful of their parents' wealth and social position; while Mildred had become so absorbed in her studies

that she was usually quite oblivious to caste and society generally; and her peace of mind was seldom greatly disturbed by their reference to her poverty and humble station, or their own affluence and fine social position.

Besides, she had such a wealth of imagination that her leanness of pocket was often forgotten. She was fascinating her schoolmates so deeply with her descriptions of imaginary scenes and personages, that they were often quite awed by her superior acquaintances. Her dukes and lords, with attendant knights and esquires, their palaces and parks,—all, it is true, on the model of Grassmere, became at last the peculiar belongings of their dreamy little schoolfellow; while the stories she carried on through days, and sometimes weeks, of their doings and mishaps, were more fascinating than any fairy stories they read; making them forget her plain frocks and hats in the brilliance of her imagination.

But with Douglas Everett's return to school, and the knowledge that for some unaccountable reason he had taken Mildred under his care, her schoolmates would have been graciously friendly if her imagination had been as weak as their own.

Beth and Connie renewed their protestations of regard, and were exceedingly affectionate when Douglass was in sight; hoping thereby to get another invitation to Grassmere. For they were more eager now to go than ever, since they had heard Mildred describe it so many times over in a summer-dress. To see it in winter, the white statues vying in purity with the fresh-fallen snow, the frozen lake, and the sleeping flowers all so minutely described by Mildred from her own fancy, would be like a trip to fairy-land.

But Douglass paid little attention now to either girls or boys. He was a very diligent student, taking but little apparent notice of what transpired about him. He took the highest rank in his studies, and generally had received more than his share of prizes since he had attended the school. This was his last year, as he expected to enter college. The other kids used to wonder at his eagerness for study, since there was no necessity for him to excel, his future being already assured.

"If I had a place like Grassmere, with as many thousand a year as he will have, you wouldn't catch me sweating my brains over hard study, as

he does," Frank Hall, a classmate, remarked contemptuously.

"He is an only child, and they say his mother just dotes on him. Think of the pocket-money he can have," Lucius Heathcote made reply, as the group of discontented lads made Douglass the subject of conversation.

"He could travel and see things without having to study them up. For my part, I wish I had been born three hundred years ago and been a knight. They didn't have to know how to read or write, but just get a horse and sword and suit of armor, and they could make their living,—fight somebody, and get a rich heiress, if nothing else," Frank responded with a very dissatisfied air. Evidently he realized that he had fallen on very unpropitious times. They did not know that Douglass Everett's mother was more strict in the training of her boy than most mothers; and if his supply of pocket-money exceeded theirs, a minute account had to be kept of its outlay. Every month since his childhood he and his mother had been in the habit of going carefully over every dime, and a debit and credit account kept of his expenditure. Generous gifts of whatever nature had gone to the

credit side, with the purchase of whatever might be necessary or wise; but selfish or extravagant waste to the debit side. At first the latter was generally the largest; but the sorrowful look on his mother's face used to send the little lad so humiliated from the posting of his accounts that he would make very firm resolves to do better. Unfortunately he had a boy's love for self-indulgence in those little luxuries dear to every child's heart; so that it was the work of many months before he brought the credits to balance the other side of the account. His mother had striven faithfully to train her boy so that he might become a wise steward of his large fortune, — to make him a knight without fear and without reproach. Hence Mildred, as well as others, was being benefited by the wise training of this only son. Many a story had he listened to from his mother's lips in childhood, with swelling heart and throbbing pulses, of deeds, done to-day by boys and men, worthy the days of chivalry. Acts of unselfishness and self-repression, of noble daring performed in the quiet ways of life and that were possible for all to do; so that it was only natural he should be ready, as in Mildred's case, to care for the defenceless, and

use his own proud name and position as a shield for them. Besides, the dreamy-eyed little maiden had somehow appealed strangely to his boyish sympathies. The look of anguish on her face that first day at school, when her bright air-castles were shattered at her feet, and afterward the delight on her face as the beauties of Grassmere unfolded to her wondering gaze, together with the pretty picture of motherliness she presented while caring for the two little ones at home, made her seem quite unlike any other of his girl-friends.

The holiday joys had nearly passed from pleasant realities into very agreeable memories, while other interests besides the giving and receiving of presents, with festive merrymaking generally, were beginning to absorb the children's minds, when one January morning, when the air was chill with promise of coming storm, Douglass overtook Mildred just at the school-gate, and, after a few words of conversation, invited her and any two of her schoolmates she chose to Grassmere the following Saturday. Her face, as she turned it towards him for an instant, reminded him of the illuminated pictures of some beautiful saint, such as he had seen painted by the old masters.

"Do you care so very much for Grassmere?" he asked, with surprise.

"It helps me to imagine what heaven is like, and the sort of place my father has now. Besides, I like to see it for other reasons," she very honestly added.

"Ah, that is right, it makes you less of a spirit-maiden," Douglass said, with a smile.

"May I ask Beth and Connie again?" she inquired timidly.

"Anyone you choose, or you can come alone."

"Oh, no. If you would just as soon, they would enjoy going so much; and I am getting tired of describing it to them. They have mostly forgotten about it. We have been wanting so much to see those poor people standing out in the snow."

"What poor people?"

"The marble ones; they must look so cold these chilly days." Mildred shivered sympathetically.

"What an observing little kitten you are! It never occurred to me to think of their looking cold. I expect if you owned Grassmere, you would make woolen coats for them."

"No; they would look too much like the scare-crows my mother tells me about, in English meadows and gardens. I would get the man who made them to carve others and make them already clothed."

Douglas laughed as he sprang up the steps, while Mildred waited for the little figures she spied entering the gate.

"Oh, girls, I have such beautiful news for you!" she cried.

"Has your sailor husband really and truly come?" Beth asked.

"Ever so much better than that!"

"Do tell us what it is," Connie said impatiently. Her imagination worked with difficulty, and she did not enjoy the exertion of guessing.

"Douglas has invited us to Grassmore on Saturday."

"Did he say for Connie and me to go?" Beth asked incredulously.

"He said I might ask any two girls I liked; and so it is to be you."

"You are just a perfect darling!" Beth danced around Mildred in great glee. "You are the luckiest playmate to have in the whole school. It's just splendid to be poor."

"It's splendid to be friends with the poor when they get you nice invitations and things," Connie judiciously corrected Beth's statement.

"Well, we have had no end of good times with

Mildred, anyway. She got us first to Grassmere, and then the afternoon visits at her place with the children, and then the make-believes. I declare I 'most think we have a sailor father somewhere. I dream about him lots of times. The other night I dreamt I saw him drowning. But I always have bad dreams after eating lobster-salad," Beth knowingly added.

"Did he actually get drowned?" Mildred asked, looking really startled and uneasy.

"I 'most forget; but it was only a dream," Beth replied reassuringly.

"It is only a dream anyway; and if you really saw him drown, we must give him up and get some mourning to wear."

"What a queer girl you are, Mildred Kent!" Connie said with a good deal of contempt. "We can make believe he was rescued."

Mildred shook her head. "I can never be certain about him after this," she said sadly. "Paul and Grace will cry, I am sure, when I tell them of his death."

"There, I have no patience with you. If it weren't for Grassmere I would have nothing at all to do with you for ever so long. Just as if we

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Beth dreams. She's a greedy child anyway, and
always eating something not good for her."

"I don't eat any more than you; there now,"
Beth retorted, with flushed face and snapping
eyes.

"I don't dream and spoil things, anyway," Con-
nie retorted contemptuously.

"That is all Mildred's fault. She is so particu-
lar about her make-believes."

"I can't help it, girls. If I don't feel things,
I cannot make believe them. It would be like
acting a lie."

"It is all lies, anyway. You were never mar-
ried, and we have no father only our own. No
one has more than one father; not even the Pres-
ident's children," Beth said, with sudden conscien-
tiousness.

"I thought we should all be so happy, and you
would be glad about going to Grassmere; and now
we are doing nothing but quarreling," Mildred
said, very sorrowfully, and then went to the class-
room. Beth and Connie finished their passage at
arms outside; each one blaming the other for the
breach of peace until the bell rang and termi-

nated their wordy war. But their natures were not superfine; so that they could easily quarrel and as easily forget their small unpleasantnesses — loving each other afterward just as effusively as if no breeze had ruffled the smoothness of their friendship. But Mildred was differently constituted and trained. She was not accustomed to broils at home, neither could she easily resume the kindly relations with schoolmates when the peace was broken, when, as in this case, she felt no blame lay with her. Instead, now, of having a happy morning, filled with gracious fancies respecting their coming visit to Grassmere, she cried away down in her heart, as she was wont to describe her sorrowful hours, and wondered at the crooked ways of this disjointed, uncertain experience we call life.

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CHAPTER XV.

DISCUSSIONS.

THE day following was one of January's fiercest storms,—driving snow and wind,—so that Mildred was not only kept in the house all day, but filled with alarm lest the Saturday's visit should prove an impossibility.

"Winter is so much worse than summer. If it storms then, the rain don't drift every place up like snow," she exclaimed sorrowfully, while watching the dreary prospect outside, thinking meanwhile of the stretch of open country lying between the city and Grassmere. "I don't think it pays to be expecting anything in this world; it is so very upsetting in its ways," she remarked disconsolately.

"Never mind, there are plenty of other Saturdays stretching summerwards; and Douglass will invite you again," her mother said consolingly.

"I don't know if I could live to another Saturday. It seems so far away."

"Time won't seem so long to you forty years hence, my child."

"Forty years!" Mildred gasped, "that seems farther away than heaven."

"And so it may be," the mother said with a sigh, as she thought of her child's intense nature, so liable to be soon burnt up by its own inner passion.

"I should n't mind waiting a good many weeks if I could go to Grassmere, and have my dinner by gas-light," Paul said, more interested in the dinner itself, however, than the gas-light.

His remark turned Mildred's attention away from her own disappointment. "I believe I am just as selfish as I can be," she said humbly, "fretting because I can't have what I want right away, while you do not have it at all. But never mind, Paul, I will tell you everything over and over again after I come back."

"It makes me hungry hearing about the dinner — the turkey, and tarts, and pudding. My, wouldn't

I eat if I was there! Do they eat up in heaven?" He turned eagerly to his mother. "Do they have plenty of roast meat and geese and turkeys?"

"You terrible boy!" the mother said, greatly shocked at his materializing heaven's purity. "There are no animals killed there, no death at all, not even of a flower. You must try to think of heaven very differently from that."

"Mildred says there's all kinds of nice-tasting fruits there, and birds. Anyway I'd like to go somewhere, so that I can get plenty of good things to eat."

"Never mind, Paul; I guess you won't have to die to get good things. You will be a man some day, and earn lots of money," Mildred said very assuringly.

"But it is so long to wait," he objected, after thinking the matter over in silence for some moments. "And I want something good now. Say, mamma, can't we have another Christmas goose, with onions and turnips, and pudding with lots of sauce?" he asked eagerly of his mother, whose face wore a smile, but seemed a trifle sad, nevertheless, while she looked at her rapidly growing

boy with his keen, healthy appetite that craved stronger food than she could conscientiously give him. But her work was commanding higher pay now, and soon, she hoped, the wolf would be forever driven from her door.

"Yes, Paul, you shall have another Christmas dinner very shortly. We will have our bills all paid in a few days, and then there need be no more pinching if God gives me health."

The debts she spoke of had been a necessity, since they were contracted while she was learning the art of fashioning becomingly the handsome garments her customers were now wearing with so much comfort.

Paul grew cheerful with the near prospect of another Christmas; while Mildred, although still casting an occasional anxious glance through the window at the raging elements without, said no more about her disappointment; and the home soon regained its wonted cheerfulness.

Mrs. Kent, all through her children's lives, had tried to make every day, so far as possible, a gala day; not waiting, as so many do, for some impossible future in which to be completely happy. There was, in the busiest time when she could be

with them, the children's hour, when stories were told, very often to the rhythm of the swift glancing needle, and innocent merry-making that made her children, as well as herself, both healthier and happier. Her hands worked all the busier in the more exciting passages of the stories she related or the actual histories she rehearsed from a well-stored memory. And now she was training Mildred to utilize the knowledge she was acquiring from week to week at school by imparting it to the younger ones. The task was, at times, very irksome; for Mildred was a martinet in the matter of school-discipline, and compelled from the reluctant children the same silence and industry that was the rule in Park Avenue School. Forgetting her own early difficulties in overcoming the mysteries of letter-learning and word-building, she often grew impatient at their inattention and stupidity. Paul could very readily sympathize with her lack of this rare grace at Grace's slow progress in knowledge, but deeply resented it when his own turn came.

Mildred was ambitious to teach Paul everything she was herself learning, more particularly her own favorite drawing-lessons; but this branch of instruc-

tion taxed her patience most sorely of any. His straight lines as frequently represented curves as what they were intended for; while his cows, if unprovided with horns, would do very nicely for pigs or dogs, or any other quadruped, provided one's imagination was vivid enough to make up for his lack of skill. His landscapes, which he was particularly anxious to work at, were even worse, being a confused mass of pencil-marks. In reply to Mildred's not very patient criticisms one day, he said impetuously: "Anyway, I can get more paper covered in an hour than you do in a day; and what's the odds how it looks? Anybody with eyes can see the out-doors for themselves. It's just a waste of time copying live things, for they are only make-believes."

"Oh, Paul, how can you say that?" Mildred remonstrated. "If you could only see the Grassmere pictures, prettier than any out-doors we can see, you would try to be a painter too."

"If you want to make them, you can; but I don't, and I will never make another picture as long as I live." He laid down his pencil decidedly; and Mildred's entreaties after that were unavailing in getting him to make any more land-

scapes. But his aptitude at figures consoled her greatly and commanded a respect that went far to atone for his incapacity for appreciating art.

Though Mildred often grew very weary of teaching, her mother wisely believed the discipline would be ample recompense for hours of drudgery thus employed. She had herself learned the value of any help we get through the journey of life that lifts the soul to serenest heights, to wider perspectives. When there is more to enervate than uplift, anything, no matter how tiresome, that lifts us out of ourselves and to a higher plane of thought and action should be eagerly utilized. She realized her responsibility of motherhood in moulding the characters, not of her own children alone, but of other possible generations through them; therefore she strove with all diligence to build characters that might be a help in the world, if God willed that they should one day join its great host of workers; if not, that they might be ready for still higher existences, if taken from it. Already, with joy, she saw her work bearing fruit in Mildred's character, in the earnestness with which she took hold of whatever presented itself in the form of duty, the honesty and purity of her actions, and more especially in her unselfishness.

The Saturday afternoon duly arrived; the storm had long since ceased, and street and highway were in excellent condition for locomotion of all kinds. Beth and Connie, as on that memorable midsummer afternoon, came to Mulberry Street to await the sleigh from Grassmere. Beth's dream was still very vivid in Mildred's mind; and she had decided that some visible token must be presented in respect to his memory. The other children very reluctantly allowed themselves to be put into mourning for their deceased sailor father, but only in view of Grassmere and the other benefits that Mildred brought them did they consent to accept her decision that they were fatherless, and must preserve the proprieties accordingly. But Paul and Grace, with the satisfaction sometimes experienced by full-grown mourners, donned their badge of sorrow with alacrity.

Beth and Connie turned over the generous-sized crape favors Mildred had made and presented them critically.

"If they ask us at Grassmere who it is for, what shall we say?" Beth questioned anxiously.

"We'll say a distant relation was drowned," Connie replied.

"You should not say drowned, nor tell a story, either," Mildred corrected.

"What shall we tell them, then?"

"Perhaps they won't ask; genuine ladies are never inquisitive, mamma says; but if they do we will tell them the truth."

"What will be the truth, anyway?" Connie asked sarcastically.

"That a make-believe relation is dead," Beth hastened to answer Connie's question. "I really think we had better not wear these bows. Crape don't correspond with my blue dress or Connie's crimson; and Mildred, your blue merino is a dreadfully bad color to match with crape."

"Very well, I won't insist, but I wish you were willing; and real mourners are never very particular about their clothes," Mildred said sorrowfully.

"Suppose we pin them on the back," Connie suggested, with a brightening expression; "We can keep our faces to the folks, and then they won't see them."

This plan was cheerfully decided on; but Mrs. Kent, who had been an amused listener, concluded from the extent of Mildred's bows they would be visible from every point. Precisely at two o'clock

the sleigh drove up to the gate. Paul, in his eagerness to behold once more the prancing horses, darted out into the frosty air, his badge of mourning floating airily in the wind. He met Douglass on the way, whose keen eyes caught sight of the huge bow under the chubby chin.

"Why, what is all this crape for?" he asked, with surprise.

"We have lost another father," Paul called back proudly.

They had so many limitations it was a comfort to have an abundance of parents, if nothing more. Douglass decided it must be a grandfather, while much amused at the visible token of mourning under which Paul labored. The girls met him gleefully at the door, while just behind them stood Mrs. Kent, looking so happy Douglass reckoned the family must have all their mourning well in sight.

"I hope you have not lost any near friend, Mrs. Kent," he tried to say with becoming sympathy. "Paul told me just now he had lost a father recently."

"It is only an imaginary one that Mildred has been supplying them with. Her fancies are so

strong, she impresses them on the children as realities."

"And when did he die?"

"One of them saw him drowning in a dream, I believe. Mildred has been trying to preserve the proprieties usual on such occasions. Perhaps I do wrong to permit it, but they take so much satisfaction in their make-believe, that I have not courage to forbid them."

"It cannot do them any harm, I am sure," Douglass said, turning around just in time to see Paul standing dangerously near the horses' heels.

Hastily saying good-bye, he ran down the garden-path, and was soon at the child's side, swinging him out of harm's way.

"I just wanted to touch their legs," Paul said by way of apology, "I wasn't going to hurt them one bit."

"I am quite sure of that; but there was danger of their hurting you. No one knows what might happen if you ever tried to do so again."

"They can't bite behind there."

"No, but they might kick, which would probably be far worse for you." Paul surveyed the horses with increasing interest, and resolved to have

Mildred adopt horses, instead of parents. A span of black beauties like these would seem very real, if only Mildred got fully interested in them. He felt sure now that he could be of considerable assistance himself in finishing them off with harness and other necessary points. He watched them out of sight, and then trotting briskly into the house, divested himself of his mourning, and announced to Grace that he was glad their sailor father was no more; for he was going to get a span of horses in his stead.

Grace looked surprised, and concluded to take hers off too; more because it chafed her neck, however, than for any other reason.

If the drive to Grassmere under the green trees and by the blossoming gardens had been a delight, it was no less so now when these were shrouded by the glistening snow. Mildred's face was a picture when they came in sight of the first hemlock tree standing in its white shroud. She had never seen the like before, save perhaps in dreams, or in some mysterious fashion through the eyes of dead and gone ancestors, in which way alone we can account for the naturalness with which the altogether new and strange sight first appears to us.

"Could any one but God have made anything so perfect?" she murmured, with a rapture that had something of passion in it.

"Why, of course not!" Connie said contemptuously. "Nobody ever said so."

The light faded out of Mildred's face while she shut her lips very firmly. But there was beauty piled on beauty in such profusion at every step of the way as they left the unsightliness of the city and came into the natural scenery of the strip of country before they reached Grassmere, that she well-nigh forgot Connie's snub; while Douglass, who looked occasionally at the eloquent face, resolved that such a young vixen as Connie De Smythe should not be a third time invited to Grassmere. At last, as they drove up through a plantation of evergreens, the lips so firmly sealed flew open. "It is better than any picture!" she exclaimed. "I wonder if they have anything in heaven prettier than those trees, looking like white-robed priests and nuns."

"You are the silliest girl, Mildred Kent. To compare heaven to those spruce-trees covered with snow! Why, even our school-house is ten times finer. Why don't you go in raptures over it?" Connie said, with great disdain.

"It never struck me as being pretty," Mildred said humbly. "It makes me happy to look at those trees, as if I was listening to the church-organ, or when the wind moans and whistles up in the attic, that seems to me the very best sound God has put into this world. I cannot help feeling so, Connie; and please don't get angry with me any more; and I won't speak about those things I like so well, if I can help it."

"Well, of all things, to like the noise the wind makes! I would sooner hear cats fighting; for you know just what that noise is," Beth said.

"I expect our eyes and ears are not all made alike. I have often wondered if things looked just the same to me as to you and other people. Trees don't, and wind music don't either," Mildred said, looking much relieved, for it was a source of pain that she and her companions regarded things so differently.

"I am very certain you little girls are not made at all alike; there is a world of difference in you," Douglass said, quite politely, but very emphatically. Only that they were his guests, it would have given him much satisfaction to have told Beth and Connie out of what very coarse material he considered they were composed.

Connie looked up curiously in his face, and after a doubtful pause said: "Which of us is made out of the best stuff? I am sure Beth and I eat the best food; so we must be the best, I think."

"If it is any satisfaction for you to think so, you are perfectly welcome to your opinion," Douglass said sarcastically.

Mildred, who had been absorbed in the leafless, gnarled branches of a huge oak, descended suddenly to the society of the human rather than vegetable growths.

"Please don't let us worry about which is best; only God really knows that; but if we ask Him to make us good, we will be like angels by-and-by—such glorious beings, maybe, that we will wonder why we ever cared for anything but to be like God."

"Don't you think Mildred is the very oddest girl you ever saw or heard tell of? She thinks far more about the angels and such things, I do believe, than she does about candy or new clothes; and she don't seem to think about being grown up, and the good times she is going to have; but all her spare talk is about what a happy angel she is going to make. I declare it often

makes my flesh creep to hear her talk." Connie wound up her harangue with a pretty shrug she was learning to imitate from their new chambermaid.

"Perhaps I do think Mildred is the oddest girl I ever saw; but it is a scarce sort of oddity, and a kind that I rather like, or I would not take the trouble to bring her out to Grassmere," Douglass said, a trifle sternly.

Connie looked a little abashed, but persevered in her criticisms. "Don't you think it is just as well not to talk about dying and the angels so much? I try not to think of them. If I wake up in the night, I am just sure to get thinking about them and Mildred. I 'most wish sometimes she had never come to our school."

"But Connie, Death and the angels are ahead of you, even if I had never been born."

"But you make me think of them so much. You can't look at a good-sized cloud or a tree without wondering if they have the same kind in heaven, or even as good ones."

"Yes, and we never hear another soul speak about those things outside the church. One don't mind hearing about them there; for there's so

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much to look at, you don't pay much attention to
the preacher; and there are so many others lis-
tening, you let them have a good share of the
preacher's advice," Beth chimed in.

The horses' heads were turned through the gates,
and past the lodge nestling amid the huge snow-
drifts. Mildred's face grew less sorrowful as she
looked at the snow-covered garden and statues, and
the others grew so interested looking around at the
well-described scene, they ceased to find fault
with Mildred and the angels.

CHAPTER XVI.

A JOY REPEATED.

THE merry jingle of bells floated up in the still, frosty air, warning Mrs. Kent, who had been listening quite anxiously for some time, that her daughter had come. A confusion of voices, and then the clear good-night went floating starward; and a few seconds afterward a little muffled figure came stumbling up the snowy path.

"Oh, mamma, see how I am wrapped up," Mildred exclaimed, at sight of her mother in the door-way: "Mrs. Everett said my cloak was too thin; and here is something she bought for me on the way here. She says it is to be my Christmas present. We all went into a store together, and

I tried on ever so many before she was satisfied. It cost a lot of money." Mildred was standing by the lamp, now, twisting herself out of shape trying to see it from all sides. "It's better than Connie's, for she said so. Is it not beautiful to be rich?"

"It certainly is, if one has a heart like Mrs. Everett; but she is, I am afraid, one in ten thousand, or perhaps a million, of rich people."

"The Bible says 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'; and of course it must be so, for the Bible never says what is not true. But really I can't think how Mrs. Everett is going to get more good out of her gifts than I do. See how much good this blue merino frock and my kid boots have done me; and now the cloak, it is so lovely and so warm!"

"She gets her blessing in her heart. Yours is a temporal, and here a spiritual blessing; and that is the very highest that even God can give us."

"I expect it is," Mildred said, not fully convinced yet, as she laid the pretty garment on the table and stood stroking it lovingly.

"Did you have a happy afternoon?"

"Oh, yes; happier even than the other visit; for I

knew beforehand how very grand everything was, and so I did not feel frightened. We were in the house all the time, and I saw so many pictures. Mrs. Everett played for us on a great organ in the music-room, just like they have in the church; and she and Douglass sang. I believe music is nearly as good as painting; only when the sound ceases you have nothing to show for it except the memory."

"But memories can be very delightful," the mother said, with a dreamy, retrospective look in her own fair face, that had a trace of sadness in it, as if her memories were both bitter and sweet."

"And tantalizing, too, mamma. I am afraid it won't make me any happier, remembering the music and pictures, and all the beautiful things I saw there. I was better contented with our home before ever I went to Grassmere; and I know that is wicked. My text, not long ago, was what St. Paul said when he was in prison: 'In whatsoever state I am, I have learned therewith to be content.' I am far better off than he was; and yet I am not content with our little house and old furniture, and the pictures and harmonium." Mildred glanced around discontentedly.

"But, my child, you cannot expect to begin in your religious experience where St. Paul left off. It will cost you many years and a thousand heart-aches to learn that what God gives you is just the very best. Patience is a flower of His own planting, that grows slowly, and with most of us gets sadly stunted, sometimes well-nigh destroyed."

Mildred sat looking intently into the fire for a good while, then with a little sigh she turned away, saying: "I won't be wicked any longer. I will ask God to make His flower, Patience, grow well in my heart."

"You can think of Jack Carver's noisy, unkind home, or the smoky room where Tommy Tuffin stays with his parents — one cannot call it living — when you get in a repining mood. There are a great many poor homes to one like Grassmere; and even Mrs. Everett has her heart-aches, you may be sure."

"I wish she hadn't any. It wouldn't make us any more content to know she was sorrowful." Mildred spoke reproachfully.

"My child, it is the lot of everyone in this world to have some trouble. Even the Queen, amid all her splendor, has one of the saddest faces we see

anywhere. The higher up one is placed in this world, the more are they exposed to its bitterest storms."

"And yet, I mean to try and get up just as high as I can. I want to be rich and famous some day."

"Why, Mildred! I thought you were trying to be a Christian," Mrs. Kent said, quite shocked at the change in her once humble-minded daughter.

"But there must be rich and famous people, just as well as poor folks without ambition. I think God would prefer having those who do love and serve him truly to have the best things. I shall help poor people when I get rich, and make them happy, like Mrs. Everett does. She spoke with a seriousness that proved she was confident of her future success in conquering fate.

"We should strive for the best things; but I hardly think these are to be rich and famous."

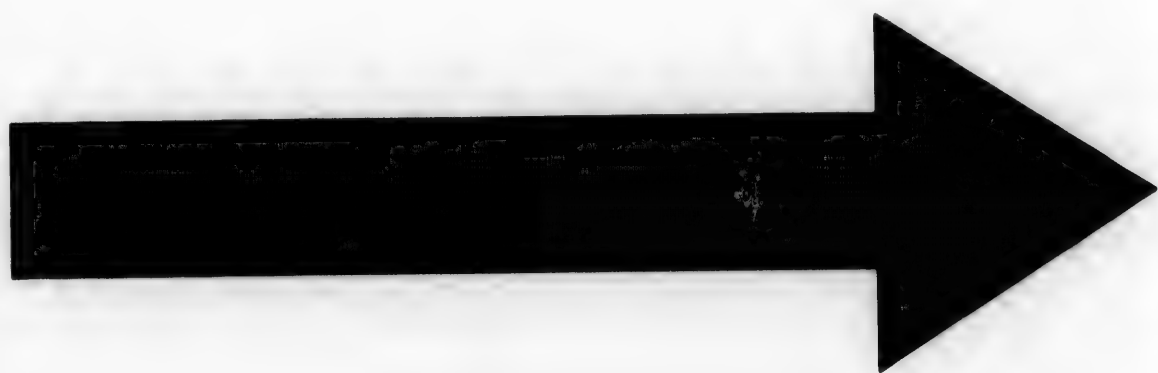
Mildred made no reply, but the expression of her face showed she was still unconvinced.

"But you have not described your visit yet, my child."

Mildred leaned back contentedly in her chair, with closed eyes, and commenced the recital by first de-

scribing the drive out and their reception by Mrs. Everett in the great hall, where a bright wood-fire was burning cheerily.

"You would forget it was winter-time, it was so warm and lovely. Flowers were blooming all around — great lilies and roses and hyacinths, all mixed with ferns — and so many other kinds of flowers whose names I did not know. Anyway, I could not take much time to look at them, for the fire-light looked so nice in the picture-frames I had to go right away and look at the pictures inside. After a while we went to the music-room, and oh, mamma! it was grand there. I almost wished I could die, if heaven was any better. Perhaps it was selfish, but it seemed such an age before I should get old and be happy again. Mrs. Everett brings more lovely sounds out of the organ than I ever knew there were in this world; and her singing, sometimes, was like a bird's. She seemed so happy, too, to have Douglass stand beside her and turn her music. He sings, too, but not like her. She would look at him as if he were nicer than anything in the world; and I don't wonder; for he is as respectful to her as if she were better than dis-



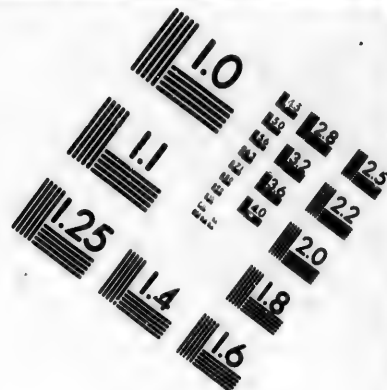
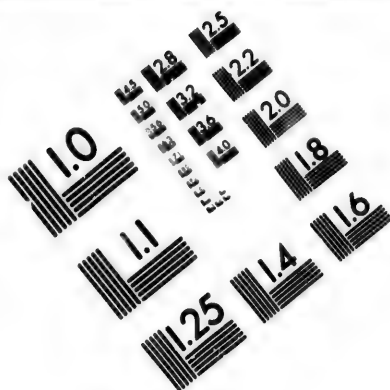
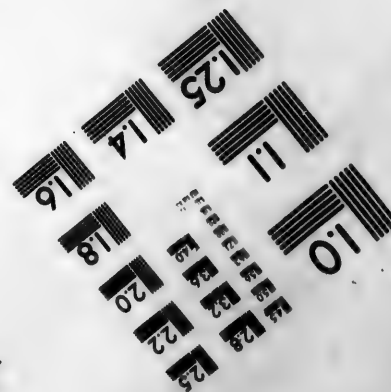
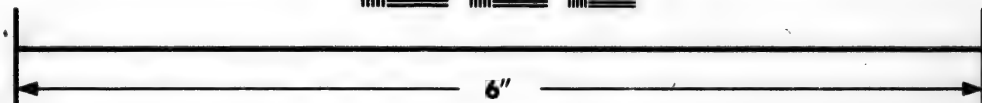
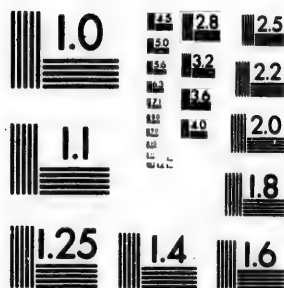


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monds. Once she called him her knight, and it made me think of those beautiful old days I have read about, when men were so brave and true, and women so fair to look upon. Maybe there are just as good and true knights now-a-days; only they have a poorer chance to prove their goodness." Mildred opened her eyes and looked dreamily into the glistening coals, as if she saw there the old castles with their moats and draw-bridges, and steel-clad knights and fair dames passing to and fro on proudly stepping horses, now all gone to dust, ages ago.

"Oh! isn't it a wonderful world? I can see all those we read of in history better after being at Grassmere. While Mrs. Everett was playing, I was looking at the people hanging on the wall; for there are a great many of them looking just like life in the music-room,—pretty women and little children in handsome frocks, and men with swords and bunches of stuff on their shoulders, and lots of gold cords. After a while I seemed to see them walking about in the high rooms and bowing and talking to each other, until I got so interested that I forgot the music, and Mrs. Everett, and all."

"My child, you must not allow your imagination to carry you away so far."

"Is it wicked?" she asked, looking startled for the moment.

"Perhaps not wicked; but I do not think you will get on so well in the real world if you live so much in the ideal. Your life probably will be a facing of stern realities and constant work; and it will be well for you to look upon the world as a place of conflict, rather than of rosy day-dreams."

"If it is not really wicked, I shall not give up my thoughts, for they will help me to work better. While I think of other days, and people dead and gone, I won't mind things so much when I remember how many have lived and been happy and sorrowful; and now they are all gone to dust. When I have troubles, they won't seem so hard to bear when I remember others had the same, and have got over them all, and long ago forgotten them."

"If you are going to be a philosopher as well as idealist, I won't say anything. I believe you are getting farther on in some respects than I or most persons I have known."

"It must be because I have been so much alone

with the children. I don't think nearly so much now as before I went to school. Things seem more on the surface to me," she said reflectively.

Her mother looked at her curiously, and with some anxiety, wondering if the mind were not developing too rapidly for the little case it was in, and wishing her daughter were a little more like other children and less of a spirit-maiden.

"Mrs. Everett was so kind to me," she continued sedately. "After they finished singing, she came where I was sitting on a tiny sofa just large enough for two, and not shaped like sofas I have seen before. She walks so gracefully, I couldn't help thinking of my kitten we used to have, that was so pretty. Not that she looks the least bit like cats as some folks do; but one graceful creature may put you in mind of another far below it in everything. She asked me if I liked music or painting best. I thought a while, but could not say for certain; but at last I said, I always liked painting best until to-day. She laughed, and it sounded just like music, and said: 'That is a very delicate compliment; one would fancy you had been at court.' I told her that I meant it for

truth. She said; 'I know that; I could not imagine you telling an untruth.' I was pleased then, but I noticed Connie looked hurt, and presently she said; 'Why, Mildred tells more stories than all of us put together. She makes believe she has a husband at sea, and that we are her children, and he was going to bring us home such quantities of handsome presents, only Beth killed him the other night.'

"I presume, then, it is out of respect to his memory that you wear all this crape."

"Yes, Mildred made them for us, and we only wear them to please her," Beth said.

"We pinned ours behind and meant to keep our faces to you; but we kept forgetting. It has been a real burden on our minds ever since we came," Connie said, real crossly! Then Mrs. Everett looked at Douglass, and I thought they would like to laugh, and I felt very badly. But in a minute Mrs. Everett spoke so kindly to me. She thought it was beautiful for me to amuse them in that way, it brought out something in my brain—I forget the name—and then we were not thinking of unworthy things. Beth was real good. She said we had just lovely times together, and that I made

Paul and Grace so happy at Christmas, describing the presents Santa Claus had prepared for them; but had no room in his sleigh to bring them; and then, only think, Mrs. Everett put her arm around me and hugged me right up close to her, and then she kissed me right on my mouth. But she never kissed Beth or Connie," Mildred ended very complacently.

"She knew they had so much more to make their lives bright than you, my child," Mrs. Kent said, with grave reproof. She was sorry to see Mildred display the slightest taint of selfishness with her young companions.

"I did not think of that. I just believed it was because she liked me best," she said, quite humbled.

"Is it a disappointment to think otherwise?"

"I am afraid so; and that is not having the Golden Rule in my heart, is it?" she sorrowfully confessed.

"No, dear, but we often find it harder to think the Golden Rule than to act it."

"I should not be glad to rob Beth and Connie of any pleasure; for I do believe that I am really better off than they, you are so much kinder than their mothers, and it so much more home-like and

cosey here than at their homes. One would get tired even of Grassmere, if there was nothing but the splendid things to look at without love and sociability."

"You are finding in youth what many people do not discover in a life-time."

"What is that?"

"The secret that happiness does not consist merely in the abundance of our possessions, but has its spring in an unseen, deeper source."

"To help others is one way to be happy, I believe."

"Yes, my child, and a very real way; we need not wait until we get rich, either, to begin."

"I expect there is no one so poor but can help somebody. Jack Carver even helps those terrible children at his home; and, oh, mamma! that reminds me we were talking about Jack and the mission-class. Beth and Connie were telling about their handsome Christmas presents, and then Mrs. Everett asked me what Santa Claus had brought us. I felt a little ashamed, but said you had to help make gifts for the school, and we made up our minds to have our Christmas cheer in making others happy. She asked me how I en-

joyed that kind of a Christmas. I said when I felt pretty good I liked it; but at other times I felt like having presents too, like other folks. I felt very badly to have to tell her, but I couldn't very well help it when she asked me. She looked at Douglass again, and I think they laughed back of their faces; but she said very kindly: 'You are an honest-hearted girl, not to make a heroine of yourself.' Then she asked about your school and the presents; and only think! she is coming herself very soon. Won't it be beautiful if she invites you and Mr. Felton and the children to Grassmere?"

"That is more than we can expect; but she may give us some presents for the children."

"I hope it won't be tracts. Jack told me they were getting tired of reading."

"Mr. Felton seems to think they have very hungry intellects. He spends a good deal of money on them in food of that kind," Mrs Kent said, smiling at Mildred's remarks.

"I am very tired telling about Grassmere now. May I finish another time?" she asked very wearily.

"I forgot that you had been talking so long,

my child. Your descriptions are so interesting, I grow selfish in listening to you."

"If only the school is invited out, Paul and Grace can go too. I think I could get courage to ask Douglass for them."

"You must not build your fancies on such an uncertainty as that."

"But, mamma, it is far more likely to happen than I was to get an invitation in the first place. It won't be any harm for me to plan about it," she pleaded.

"Certainly not, but a very useless waste of imagination."

"Not if it makes me happy to think about it; and may I tell the children?"

"If it will add to your pleasure, my pet." The mother smiled lovingly into the little face so near her own that she had but to reach out her hand and draw it near enough to kiss.

"I will go to bed now. Maybe I won't get to sleep for a long time, I will have so much to think of."

The mother sat brooding for a long time over her child's future, so liable to be full of pain and unsatisfied longing, with her intense artistic nature.

Then, as all true mothers must do, she held her tryst with the Friend whose help is always available and always perfect, committing her child to His most blessed care.

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CHAPTER XVII.

PAUL'S FIRST SLEIGH-RIDE.

MILDRED'S first inquiry the following Sunday, on her mother's return from the school, was to know if Mrs. Everett had been there; and the disappointing answer was given that only Mr. Felton and the usual crowd of children were there.

"She will come some time soon, I am sure," she said confidently; "and I know you will love her. She never seems to be thinking about herself, but how to make others who are near her happy. Won't Betsy Jones's eyes snap when she sees Grassmere, and the organ, and Mrs. Everett playing on it!"

"Why, when will that be?" Paul asked, surprised. "Are they going to have her out, too?"

"Yes, some day, all the mission-school, and you and Grace."

"Who told you? Did Mrs. Everett say so?"

"No, but I feel it the same as other things that happen."

"And will we have turkey and all that, as you had?"

"I cannot say for certain. Sometimes in books they just give lemonade and sponge-cake to poor children."

Paul concluded a visit to Grassmere fasting would be something very superior, especially if carried there by those black horses. For some time Mildred's powers of imagination were greatly overworked, since Paul insisted on having stories about horses alone. Her knowledge was very slim of animals generally, and even Paul dared to criticise her descriptions of their general anatomy, and more particularly the harness with which she attempted to clothe her horses. She paid especial attention now to the horses she saw on the street, making timid inquiries now and then about them from her schoolmates, who generally laughed at her.

But one day, summoning courage, she stepped up to Douglass, who had paused for a moment at the school-gate, and said: "Will you please tell me something about that horse going past?"—and the horse being a fine animal which a groom was leading.

"Why of that particular horse?" he asked.

"It is such a beauty, and Paul wants me to have make-believes now altogether about horses. I have been looking for a pretty horse to adopt, and I think I will take that one."

"You have made a very judicious choice; his owner asks ten thousand dollars for him."

Mildred's eyes sparkled. "What is his name?"

"Cadmor."

"Is he very old?"

"About five or six years, I should say."

This surprised her more than his great value; not so old as Paul, and yet the immense size he had attained.

"How much faster he has grown than we do! In some things horses are far before human beings."

"So are whales," Douglass replied.

Mildred watched him until the groom turned a

street corner and Cadmor was no longer to be seen.

"Thank you for telling me so much. I shall manage nicely now for a long while."

"Is your brother, then, so fond of horses?"

"Oh yes, he dreams about them at night, and he never tires of talking about yours. I should like so much to know their names."

Mildred looked up wistfully into her companion's face.

"You might have known that long ago. Prince and Victor. Ask me any questions you wish and I will answer if possible."

"The others laugh at me, and I get afraid."

"Never mind, they do not understand you; that is why they laugh."

"You understand me, don't you?" she asked, with a very contented air.

"Pretty well, I think. But see, would your brother like to come to Grassmere with you, and have a ride on my pony, and see the horses? There are a dozen of them, I believe."

Mildred gasped, her breath being nearly taken by such a dazzling prospect.

"I hardly know how he could live if I told him,

but he would though; for folks hardly ever die with joy, especially little boys."

"He must come, then, if it would give him such immense satisfaction. I did not know such little fellows cared for horses."

"But there will be Grassinere, too. I believe he thinks it is better than heaven."

"How does he know about it?"

"He goes to sleep at night hearing me describe it; not while I talk about the horses, though. If I knew more about them, I could make a great deal better for him."

"If there is nothing to prevent, you two can come out next Saturday; remember, just you two alone," he added, quite imperiously.

Mildred nodded her head with great satisfaction. She would much prefer Paul to Beth and Connie, for they generally made matters disagreeable by their remarks, first or last. She could scarcely wait for school to be dismissed. The hands of the clock moved with a slowness she would not see repeated, after her childhood had passed, save in some moments of supreme agony, such as soon or late comes to every matured child of Adam. But the home was reached at last, and through

the frosted window-panes the bleached but joyous faces of the children were watching for her. She moved her satchel so gleefully that Paul assured his mother Mildred had some very good news to tell them.

He opened the door, letting in with his sister such a gust of cold air it brought a sparkle to his own eye.

"Oh, Paul! I have such news for you; better than any of our make-believes. I would never dared to have gone so far," she exclaimed, nearly out of breath, sinking into the chair by the fire.

Paul looked greatly excited, while the mother dropped her work to hear the news.

"You must not die, or do anything like that when I tell you," she said anxiously.

"Oh, no, I won't; just let me hear right away what it is," he said, getting very impatient at Mildred's precautions for his safety.

"You are going to ride on a pony and see a dozen horses."

In that instant Paul seemed to make a long step towards manhood.

"To ride on whose pony?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Douglass says you may ride on his Shetland pony. It has long hair, and such a lovely tail; and it knows ever so much."

Paul stood speechless for a few seconds; but his tongue soon got over the shock and rattled away as gleefully as ever.

"When are we going?"

"Perhaps on Saturday."

"Will we have dinner?"

"Oh, yes; but you won't think of dinner after you get there."

"Yes, I will, if they have turkey, and other things as you had."

"Eating seems to me the very commonest sort of pleasure when you see all that is there. I am surprised they go to so much trouble about it. If I were rich and had such ways of enjoying myself, I would hardly think of eating — I'd just take enough to keep me well and comfortable."

"But you are only a girl; anything does for girls."

"Girls are made of better stuff than boys; so Mrs. Goose says."

"Mother Goose!" Paul retorted contemptuously, "She was an old woman herself, and how could she know?"

"You will think girls are beautiful when you see Mrs. Everett. She was a girl once," she hastened to correct.

"I think she is now, or she wouldn't have such a jolly son. We are just the luckiest family anywhere," Paul said, with great satisfaction. And so the conversation drifted on with necessary interruptions until the slow-coming Saturday afternoon arrived.

Douglass was not forgetful of his promise, and did not permit more important social duties to prevent him from coming for his expectant visitors. His mother smiled at his late developing talent for entertaining children, but still encouraged him. He got out his pony and the little sleigh he had on purpose to drive her in, which, with a little crowding, would be large enough for the three of them, and started off, the tiny silver bells jingling not un-musically to Rattler's short, quick step.

Mildred was watching the window quite as anxiously as Paul, for she had a double anxiety. It was such a fine day Beth and Connie might take a fancy to visit Mulberry Street, and that would be most unfortunate, since they would hardly forgive her for going without them; and then it was

possible that Douglass himself might not come; for she had heard the school-children talking about the English visitors at Grassmere — lords or earls, or some such notables. It seemed even to her unsophisticated intelligence hardly possible that she and Paul should be allowed to sun themselves in such high presence. Paul's eyes were getting tired trying to watch both ends of the street, when, looking around to consult the clock, Mildred cried out excitedly: "Paul! Paul! look! quick!"

He looked, and such a vision met his sight!

The tiny horse tossing his mane, the sleigh, shaped like a shell, with its fleecy robes, and Douglass looking anxiously towards the house, but still standing by the horse. They were at the door in a moment; Paul crying out, as he ran down the path, "We are coming!" and followed more sedately by Mildred.

They were soon tucked comfortably in the tiny sleigh, and Rattler's feet dancing along the firm trodden snow. It was Paul's first sleigh-ride, and he found it enchanting. His bliss, if possible, was heightened when Douglass generously put the reins in his hands after they were well beyond the city's crowd. Rattler seemed to know he had a

new driver; for he tossed his mane and skipped along more merrily than ever. Douglass was surprised at the skill Paul showed in handling the lines; but Mildred explained that he had practised a great deal on Grace, who had already grown utterly sick of the mention of horses. The little lad turned of his own accord into the Grassmere gates, helped in part, no doubt, by Rattler, but also recognizing the place from Mildred's oft-repeated descriptions. He drove up to the door in fine style, so absorbed in the undertaking he scarcely noticed the imposing house and grounds that had weighed so heavily on Mildred's spirits, but catching tantalizing glimpses of the statues standing amid the snow; and so did Rattler, who never could get over his fear of these strange figures. He reined him up and held the lines while Douglass and Mildred jumped out; and then to his regret a groom came and led Rattler away.

Paul's eyes were glistening, and his cheeks crimsoned with the frosty air and rapture combined, making him, at the first glance, a more attractive bit of humanity than his sister; but for those who could see deeper than average beholders, her face had a charm that Paul's could never claim,—the

subtle beauty of a soul attuned to fine harmonies betraying itself in every varying expression of the face. Two young girls were coming down the broad staircase as they entered, in age midway between Douglass and Mildred. They paused a moment at the foot of the steps, but as Douglass approached followed by the two children, they came forward. Douglass introduced them rather awkwardly, as if just realizing the wide social gulf between his visitors and himself; but Mildred, with a natural ease and unconsciousness of manner that was the very perfection of breeding, saluted them cordially, and then with easy grace stood waiting for Douglass to send them upstairs, whither on her two previous visits she had first gone. After a constrained pause Douglass said: "Where is my mother?"

"In the drawing-room with mamma."

For a few seconds he stood uncertainly; and then, turning to the younger of the girls, he said coaxingly, "Alicia, won't you take Mildred somewhere to unwrap?"

Alicia very cheerfully complied, while Paul watched Mildred rather wistfully as she disappeared up the long flight of stairs. He began to think

this great house was more lonely than any house he was ever in; but in a very short time Mildred was back again, when they entered the drawing-room. A stately-looking gentleman stood near the fire-place, looking rather weary and dissatisfied, Mildred thought, and by the window were sitting Mrs. Everett and another lady, much stouter, with a well-defined, red face that bore no resemblance to an angel's, Mildred decided after a close inspection.

Mrs. Everett came to Mildred, clasping the little hand, timidly given, in both her own, and permitting her hand to be vigorously shaken by Paul, who had opinions of his own on the matter of hand-shaking.

"These are some of Douglass's little friends," Mrs. Everett said, glancing towards her visitors, and then led them to chairs near the fire. Paul's eyes were dazzled by all the wonders he saw, while he kept forgetting his mother's injunction not to stare with too much curiosity at his surroundings. A little boy by another fire across the room kept looking at him with a surprised scrutiny that was growing painful, until at last he discovered it was his own reflection in one of the huge

looking-glasses. As he sat and gazed at the lofty ceiling, the walls lined with pictures, the rugs on the floor that in his eyes were much handsomer than the pictures on the wall, and all the elegant furnishings of the room, which was large enough, he decided, for a church — a sense of desolation and utter loneliness stole over him, worse than he had ever experienced at home, all alone with Grace. He took out his handkerchief and very quietly wiped his nose, at the same time whisking away a few tears. The tall man by the fire-place made him feel worse than he would have done, for he looked so proud and silent, as if little boys were of no more account than beetles. A glance at Mildred occasionally consoled him a little, for she was sitting gazing most serenely around, looking the picture of content. Douglass was at the farther end of the drawing-room, moving about restlessly among some collections of engravings. He wanted to find something to amuse Paul; for he could see by his face that the little fellow was quite miserable. He was finding, as many another host has done, that it is no easy task to happily mix two opposite classes of society; for at her first glance at the children he could see that the Lady

Hermione had decided that they were not of her station. Her sister Alicia was, like himself, something of a democrat, and was ready to be friendly, if duty required, with the cook or chamber-maid, — a characteristic that was utterly displeasing to her stately father and no less haughty sister. Douglass grew discouraged looking over the engravings, for they were mostly high art, — so high that even he found them tiresome. So he went to his mother and asked what he could do to amuse the children. Lady Merton looked at him curiously.

"Is it customary in America for lads of your age to interest themselves in mere children?"

Douglass colored. "I cannot say that it is," he replied.

His mother came to the rescue. "I have taught him to act unconventionally in some things. He can give much happiness to those not so fortunately situated as he."

"A dangerous experiment, as you may some day find, my dear."

Her ladyship cast a meaning glance at Mildred, who had risen and gone softly to her favorite picture, gazing up at it quite oblivious of her

aristocratic neighbors. Mrs. Everett smiled fearlessly up into her son's face, who stood looking very much mystified at her ladyship's remark.

"You do not understand my boy. I expect him to be a knight without fear and without reproach. Besides, he is too young to make dangerous entanglements."

"She is a remarkably pretty child — such a one as Millais would like to paint. Why does she study that picture so intently?"

"She has a passion for art. The first time she was here she stood looking at that picture — and it is the best in our collection — for more than an hour."

"Has she come of a good family?"

"I cannot say. Her parents are English; only a few years in this country, I believe. Her father is dead. Would you like to talk with her? You would find her refreshingly clever and original."

"Yes, when she leaves the picture. I want to watch her there. Her attitude is perfect. I would like to see her painted in that position." Douglass turned and looked at her too, and then his eyes wandered across the room to Hermione and

Alicia,— the one a descendant of stout-hearted yeomen who had earned their bread by the sweat of their brow; the others the descendants of a line of earls, who for hundreds of years had lived by the sweat of other men's faces; and yet the one looked as gently born as the others.

"It is very odd that poor men's children should be as well-looking as the rich. I never thought of it before," he said, still looking at the girls.

"Indeed, I have often been provoked to see them looking much better," Lady Merton said honestly. "One can scarcely tell by the outward appearance now-a-days which is mistress and which maid, except by their manner and speech. That is one advantage we have. Training makes a vast difference."

"But is it not strange that the children of highly-trained ancestors are not handsomer and more intellectual than those of the lowly? Other animals are improved in that way," he said, with a puzzled air.

"Perhaps if our very best types of humanity were always united in marriage, a portion of the race might become greatly improved,— the product of such marriages, for instance; but the Socrates

generally get the Xantippes," the Countess of Merton said, humorously.

"I believe that God so willed that everyone should have the same start at birth. Most of the really great ones whom past generations have bequeathed to us have sprung from humble parentage. There seems to be a law of compensation running through all human existence," Mrs. Everett said, as she rose to go to Paul's relief, for the pocket-handkerchief was coming into use suspiciously often. She turned to Douglass:—

"We must do something for the little lad, or he won't think Grassmere the happy place that his sister does, if some diversion is not soon provided." Douglass followed his mother, while her ladyship watched them with a wistful look on her healthy, good-humored face. If one of her girls could have been a boy like him, she thought, how happy she would be; or, better still, since there was such a plethora of children the world over, if, from the unlimited supply, one boy at least could have been bestowed upon her, how glad she would be! But under her brocades and velvets her heart yearned for more than one coveted blessing that would never be granted.

Paul was taken to see the horses. When appealed to respecting the amusement he most desired, a very emphatic reply was given in favor of the horses. Mildred very regretfully tore herself away from the pictures and the comfortable fireside and select company; for she really enjoyed stealing a hasty glance into the face of each, and weaving her romances and dreams about what she saw there. She insisted on following Paul to the stables, assuring them it was a necessity, since he only wanted to hear about horses now; and she must learn all about them that was possible in order to gratify him.

"And do you not care for them yourself?" Lady Merton asked.

"They are very nice before a carriage," Mildred said evasively. Even his Lordship smiled at the way she spoke.

Douglass found his spirits rising when he got into the stables with Paul; and that youthful admirer of horse-flesh could hardly be persuaded to enter the house again even for dinner; but his appetite was keen, and after he had tasted the delicious viands, he forgot about the horses, and only wished he could stay always at Grassmere and regale his appetite on such food.

Mildred went home that night with the welcome news that on the morrow Mrs. Everett was coming to St. Malachi's, to the mission-school. She decided her visit was quite an agreeable one, but not so perfect as she expected.

"If the Merton's had not been there," she said, "it would have been the best yet. Those great people don't seem happier than other folks, and I don't think it pays to visit with them. Are they made of just the same material that we are?"

"Just the same; did you think they were better?"

"I was not sure. I was talking with the young ladies up stairs, and they said they had never visited with poor people before — I told them we were poor, and worked for our living. It didn't seem just honest not to. I gave Lady Hermione my hands to look at. She is the prouder one, and every one, even Mrs. Everett, calls them Lady Alicia and Lady Hermione; but Douglass speaks the same to them as to me or anyone. Lady Alicia laughed when I showed my hands to her sister, and said they were just as pretty as theirs, but probably the blood was different. I tried not to mind, but it really was not pleasant."

"No, I presume it was not; but we all meet with the disagreeable in this world, from emperors and kings down. Indeed, I do not know but they have the hardest lot of any — to be supported by the tax-payers as so many drones in the hive of life, and the newspapers publishing broadcast the complaints of these who cannot see why some should have so much without any effort of their own, and others give their strength to support them in idleness."

"Do you meet with disagreeable people, mamma?"

"I often think, with more than my share. Sometimes those I work for expect impossibilities. They have never had to work, and I do not think they have the same patience as we who have so many difficulties to surmount; but, dear, it is a very necessary discipline, and I do not usually suffer very much under the severest criticisms."

"I mean to be brave, too; and after all it is a little hard for these high-born people to know they are made after the same pattern as the poorest people in the world."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE MISSION-SCHOOL.

THE children consented to keep house the following day, so that Mildred could go to the school. She was so eager to see if Betsey Jones and Jack Carver would be as charmed with the gracious mistress of Grassmere as she had been. Her own satisfaction was doubled as she thought how pleased all the children would be with their beautiful visitor, especially if she invited them to visit her. Mrs. Kent was obliged to go early; for her flock were too punctual in presenting themselves a half-hour or more before the appointed time, and they were not always a law-abiding crowd; especially since their number had been so largely increased since the Christmas-tree. Mildred whispered to Jack Carver that Mrs. Everett was coming.

"Why, she's a regular swell! what's she coming for?"

"To encourage us, I expect," Mildred replied, rather uncertain, when the question was put, which was really her reason for visiting them.

"It seems to me we come well enough without encouragement from swell folk," Jack said, a little sulkily.

"But she is so kind, I know you won't mind," Mildred pleaded.

"Yes, they're kind to us the same as they are to dogs and other animals; but I guess they don't allow we are made out of as good stuff as them."

Mildred's face flushed, for she could not conscientiously contradict Jack's assertion after her interview with the Merton girls. "But we are, Jack; even Betsy Jones is made like the Earl of Merton's daughters that I saw at Grassmere. If anything, I should say her material is the healthiest."

Jack looked critically at Betsy, who was conversing with another girl, and her eyes were snapping and lips moving viciously.

"I don't reckon Betsy very extra clay myself. She's not to be mentioned alongside of your mother."

"I am 'most puzzled about people myself; but the difference in them is a birth-mark, and not because their parents were lords, or poor people."

"I don't know much about lords and earls myself," Jack confessed. "Don't know as I ever see one; but I've read lots about them in story-papers; and a good many of them are a precious bad lot."

"I do not think they are so very happy as one might think." Mildred based this conclusion on the very dissatisfied-looking lord she had seen the day before.

"They are useless critters mostly, and don't do much but visit at each other's houses, and shoot poor, helpless animals that don't harm anything. I'd sooner hoe potatoes or sell newspapers, than be so useless," Jack said, with fine scorn.

"Maybe they are not like the ones you read about. Stories cannot always be believed, you know."

"Oh, I dare say there are some good specimens; but I guess, your mother does more than a dozen average ones."

"I have read of some excellent ones in history."

Oh, yes, I know about them; but take the good and bad together, the world would be just as well off, I guess, if they were all shipped off to the moon, or somewhere."

Mildred had a high opinion of Jack's judgment and knowledge, for he came very often of an evening and read her mother's books and talked with her, as she sat at her sewing, about their contents; and some of their conversation sounded very learned and superior to her, accustomed solely to her own little brother and sister, and the children at school, whose highest flights of fancy were about their clothes or their games.

The school opened, Mr. Felton, in his thin, unmusical voice, reading the prayers, while Mrs. Kent, according to custom, had the young folks grouped around the organ, where for a half-hour they sang the Sabbath-school melodies by which the musical taste of the rising generation is mainly formed. Betsy Jones's voice, through Mrs. Kent's careful training, had lost much of its shrill, squeaking quality; and very much against her judgment she was learning to sing softly. She was very quick in music, and had now become the acknowledged leader of singing in the school; and in

many respects a most excellent one she was, for outside the school her discipline was much stricter than Mrs. Kent's inside, and she compelled them to join in the musical part of the service, no matter how unlike it they might feel. Mildred joined with them in the singing; but Betsy soon discovered that Mrs. Kent's dainty daughter was not of much account in swelling their harmonies. Mildred's sympathies were strongly drawn out just then towards Tommy Tufts, who could not sing at all, and whose eyes were so ill matched. Plainly he was one of the unfortunate ones, towards whom Nature had apparently acted in a very unfriendly fashion.

Forgetting the singing, and even Mrs. Everett's expected advent, she went off into dreamland, planning some grand surprise from fate for Tommy somewhere along the future, whereby he might become rich and happy, notwithstanding his infirmities of voice and vision. Betsy reached around and gave her a punch. "Why don't you sing?" she muttered. She never allowed any child with a bit of song in it to stand mute during this exercise. Mildred very obediently took up her broken strain, but in a half-hearted way very displeasing to Betsy.

A rustle at the door drew all eyes. Even Mr. Felton, sitting near the door, got up and, in his blundering, near-sighted fashion, went to see who was coming. A break in the harmony warned Mrs. Kent that the children's attention was being distracted; but Betsy Jones, in her swift, keen way taking in the appearance of the new-comers, and reckoning they were something out of the ordinary, burst out with fresh force, casting at the same time a warning glance around the class. They came out, in consequence, triumphantly at the end of the verse, and Betsy would have given a good deal to know how much impressed the strangers were with her singing. While they sang the next stanza, Betsy used eye and tongue to the utmost of her powers. She had never seen quite such a vision of middle-aged loveliness as this lady who had just shaken hands with Mr. Felton, and was now standing with a tall, handsome lad at her side, kindly regarding the group around the organ. Betsy was well enough acquainted with the fashions to admire the rich grey velvet dress and elegant furs, with the pretty Paris bonnet that seemed a fitting crown to the perfect costume.

When Mrs. Kent ceased playing, and her tongue

was at liberty, Betsey murmured with more reverence than she usually exhibited: "My, but she's a stunner!" She was surprised at the ease with which Mildred took her mother to the strangers and introduced them, and equally surprised that if her dress was plain, Mrs. Kent appeared as much like a lady as the best she saw luxuriously reclining in their carriages on Fifth Avenue or Broadway. Her mind was active and her perceptions keen; and just then came to her mind a desire to be different from what she was. She looked at Mildred, and instinctively felt that if her clothes were no better than her own, or the family purse not any better filled, she had something utterly beyond what she had ever attained with all her vaunted smartness. The other children, for the most part, were looking with surprised, stolid faces; but Betsey's was far different. A new leaf had just been turned in her book of life; and, although the underlying elements of her nature were of a naturally coarse fibre, her eyes were clear enough to see there was something above her; and, with her will-power, to see this and desire its attainment was a long step on the way of her ultimately getting the shadow, even if the substance was beyond her reach.

"Mrs. Everett came up the aisle with Mrs. Kent and took her seat among the children, quite oblivious, apparently, of the fact that patched boots and garments were brushing her velvet gown, and little hands slyly stroking the soft fur of her wrap. Adelphine Carver exclaimed, quite audibly, to a companion: "It's nicer than a pussy cat's coat. Jack's face turned crimson under the combined effects of his sister's effrontery and the presence of a lad so much better dressed and appearing than himself. A jealousy seized him lest Mrs. Kent and Mildred would care more for the son of pride and luxury, as he chose to stigmatize Douglass Everett, than for himself. With the exception of the irrepressible Adelphine, the children were the pink of propriety, and sat regarding Mrs. Everett with round, curious eyes; while she told them of similar schools she had attended, and the noble men and women whom she had met working in such schools, some of them the product of just such efforts. Jack forgot his troubles while she talked, so interested did he grow in descriptions of some who had got their training in similar schools, and at last securing, in spite of privations, honorable positions in the world.

"Only last summer," she went on to say, "I had a gentleman visiting me who was attracted to a ragged school in London by the music and warm room—a ragged waif, homeless and friendless. His mind waked up there—and he had a fine mind—and with the help and sympathy of his teachers, he went on step by step until now he is a power in the world, and the best in the land are proud to have him claim them for friends. But you need not be ambitious to become celebrated or rich. Only a few have the gifts to achieve this; and great gifts are the very scarcest things, I believe, in this world; but you can all be good. A very great man, one whose name will be remembered quite as long as any who have lived in this century, has said: 'Tis only noble to be good.' After this brief life is ended, you will have leisure and opportunity in other worlds to be great and the companion of kings and mighty ones."

Mildred's eyes shone. It was so comforting to know that Mrs. Everett was on the way to heaven, and was going to have the very best gifts of two worlds, perhaps of many worlds; for Mildred was forming a strong friendship for the starry hosts

which she studied long and lovingly through the uplifted blinds of her bed-room windows when her mind was too full of thoughts for her to sleep. Already she had selected star-clusters as special scenes for study, when she had passed on to the endless leisure of eternity. Jack Carver's eyes had a gleam in them that revealed an intelligent soul somewhere in his organism which he especially designated *me*; and Betsy Jones, too, had an uplifting of countenance as if some sudden inspiration had come to her to make her life a better thing than she had intended. The others looked more or less interested, but Adelphine Carver still stroked the fur which she found softer than that of her ill-kept cat at home, whom she petted and abused by turns. The children looked considerably alarmed when they found Mrs. Everett was to be their teacher for that day. Their ignorance of the Bible made them shy of catechizing strangers. The lesson went very smoothly on, however, while their gentle catechist scarcely asked a question at all, but encouraged them to volunteer any remark or question they wished. They were not eager to respond, and her request was followed by a constrained silence; when she again

asked them if there was anything they would like her to explain, Adelpine Carver, whose attention was still absorbed in the fur cloak, piped up in her shrill, uncultured voice: "Is this made of pussy cats?"

An instantaneous display of ivory followed her question, even Mr. Felton, who was hovering near, joining in the general smile. Jack looked as if he would like to shake Miss Adelpine, but Mrs. Everett answered her question with all seriousness. "It is not made of the pussy's fur. I will send you a book that will tell you all about it," she said, with a genial smile. Adelpine was silent for a while, but still busily inspecting the fur.

"You kill 'em to get their skins?" she asked.

"Certainly they must be killed."

"Well, I wouldn't kill my pussy to wear her clothes," she said scornfully. Jack's eyes blazed, and he made a motion to carry off the obnoxious prattler; but Mrs. Kent intercepted him. Mrs. Everett folded the restless little hand in her own while she said: "God gives us the animals for clothing as well as food. Your own shoes once formed the covering of some poor animal slain to make shoes for little feet."

Adelphine craned her neck over to look, and stretching out her feet, revealed a pair of very coarse, well-worn shoes.

"I wish they'd made 'em out of a nicer animal, then," she said fretfully, "like hers, there," — pointing to Mildred's neat kid boots, that were still doing service as best since that happy summer's day she found them waiting for her at the door.

The other children were looking more keenly interested now than when the lesson was going on; while Tommy Tuffts squinted approvingly at his boots, which had been precious as the apple of his eye — the first long boots he ever possessed, possibly the last for some years, unless the school should donate another pair. The hour was up now for closing, and Mrs. Kent invited their visitor to preside at the organ for the closing exercises. Mrs. Everett played a piece or two, in which the children joined, and then motioning to Douglass, who was standing apart from the rest, she delighted Mildred's heart by singing some of those majestic strains as yet far beyond the powers of the St. Malachi's mission-school. Betsy Jones stood mute with rapture; for she had a genuine love for music, and had intellect enough to appreciate more

abstract harmonies than their simple Sabbath-school melodies. When the air had ceased to vibrate with the delicious strains, and the children in thick clusters went homewards, talking of all they had seen and heard that day, Betsy walked slowly along by herself. She had so many thoughts she wanted to be by herself,—painful, growing thoughts, making her heart restless and dissatisfied. She no longer was impressed with herself as the complete piece of girlhood she had previously imagined. The boastful affection with which her family regarded her seemed very poor satisfaction now that her eyes were opened to see what higher types of humanity there were in the world.

If she could then have had her life begin over again amid different surroundings, she would probably have consented to forego the mysterious rapture one feels, when they pause long enough in the rush of life to think deeply on the matter, because of their own personal identity—to know that I am myself—that I exist a sentient, soul-blessed particle of a vast creation.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONSECRATION.

MILDRED returned from Sabbath-school with a mixed feeling of satisfaction and disappointment. It was such a gladness having Mrs. Everett brighten the dusky spaces of St. Malachi's with her strong, gracious presence, and to have her mother meet and hear her sing and play. But alas! she had made no promise of help to the desolate little flock other than a book to the poorest specimen in the whole school. She went along the street very pensively, and at the crossing where Mr. Felton always dropped away to his own lodgings, shook hands in silence. Her mother noticed her depression, but waited for her to speak. She never forced her daughter's confidence,

but trained her to the self-respectful habit of bearing with quiet resignation the unavoidable pains of life.

Paul was waiting at the door, his hands like ice, but his face eager with expectation. Now that he had thought over quietly the incidents of his visit to Grassmere, and realized how much there was to see and enjoy, he was deeply ashamed to think what a baby he had been.

"When are we all going?" he cried, as he ran, bareheaded, through the snow to meet them.

"She never asked us," Mildred said sorrowfully, while Paul noticed a tear dropping down on her cheek.

"But you said she would," he remarked, reproachfully.

"Yes, I know; but my feelings were mistaken, I expect."

"You are too quickly discouraged, my child," Mrs. Kent said encouragingly. "It would have surprised me had she asked us to-day. She is too sensible a woman to act so impulsively."

"But think how much pleasure they might have had thinking about it if she had promised them a visit sometime."

"The pleasure may be in store for them yet, and they cannot miss what they have never expected or possessed."

"But we do miss so many things that might help us to be happy."

"My child, I am beginning to fear your acquaintance with Grassmere and its inmates gives you really more pain than pleasure. You take everything so intensely, you make life either a rapture or an agony."

Mildred stood looking silently into the glowing coals, her eyes busy tracing the mysterious faces forming and dissolving there, but her thoughts intent on something far different. Were her mother's words true, and was she not as happy as in those earlier days before she went to school and found a brave champion in the knightly lad and bewitching solacement in the brief visits to his beautiful home? She was silent for a long time, paying no heed to the children's prattle. A long heart-burdened sigh, and then a look of resolution in the soul-lit face.

"I am not going to think so much about the Everetts and Grassmerts. God did not mean for me to have such a lovely home, and to paint

pictures, and live that kind of life. I am going to ask Him to take me and make me happy in His own way."

"But, my child, you must not ask for happiness. He may know that unrest and a measure of pain may be best for you."

Another pause, and then Mildred said calmly: "I will ask Him to give me just what He knows is best, if it is pleasant to have or not."

"That is the true way to come to God."

Mildred went softly up to her room, and there alone, made her gift in all pure seriousness, and found in the consecration such a new, strange gladness, as made her for the time forget Grassmere and every other strongly coveted earthly good. Alone with her mother that evening, in the happy hour after the two other little tongues were stilled in sleep, she asked with some anxiety: "Was I converted up-stairs this afternoon? My text one day not long ago was: 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"

"I believe it was conversion. A child's faith is what the wisest philosopher must come to God with. You were sincere in giving yourself to Him;

and the joy you experienced was the seal to His compact."

Mildred sat thinking for some time in silence, and then she said: "How strange it is that one so great as God should look down from heaven upon a poor little girl like me, and come right beside me, as I felt He did to-day. I cannot tell you how near He seemed. I wish He would let me be a missionary."

"The good God will give you the right work to do for Him, if you are ready and willing to do it."

"If I were a boy I would study; and when I got to be a man, I would preach to the people, not read to them from a piece of paper hid away in the Bible, and get a look at it as if I was stealing something. Oh, I would stand right up and talk from my heart. That's the way Peter the Hermit and Savonarola and Luther did. They got ready first, their minds full of thoughts, and then they poured them out on the people." Her eyes were shining like two stars, and her form seemed to dilate at thought of how she would appeal to men's hearts to be at peace with God.

"But Mildred, you must remember it takes

splendid gifts to reach men's hearts like your favorite characters were enabled to. Preachers nowadays are thankful to get a hearing by any means, that is, the rank and file of them. It is only granted to a few rare souls in each generation to have the power to draw their fellow men in great masses, and sway them at will."

"But they could stand right out and talk honestly to them, mamma, and not play hide and seek with a sheet of paper in the Bible. I think it is setting a bad example to children."

"I did not think you were so observing. I try not to think of the minister's notes. I am glad to get good thoughts by any means."

"But I can't help seeing; and then I get so afraid that they will blow out when the wind comes through the windows, and the minister will have to stop preaching. Oh, if I were only able to do something myself! What a pity it is to be a woman!"

"Perhaps you may be permitted some day to give up home and friends, and the joys of civilized life to go away among savage people in some remote island of the distant seas, to tell the ignorant of Christ."

"I will study hard, and pray a great deal, and then if God wants me, I will be ready."

Mildred, through the coming years, was faithful to the promise made that day, as those who associated with her could attest from the rare unfoldings of her character.

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CHAPTER XX.

ESTRANGEMENTS.

THE winter slipped away as all winters, no matter how drear and desolate, have a fortunate way of doing, leaving Mildred at its close greatly changed from one year before. A resolute expression had gradually changed the gentle child-face, so that when busily thinking or puzzling over some knotty question in her studies, she looked almost womanly. A rapidly developing intellect, earnestness in performing well life's responsibilities, and an early acquaintance with care, were causing the free-heartedness of childhood to give place to the becoming dignity of young maidenhood. Beth and Connie were growing less friendly, and were not so lavish in their expres-

sions of regard, since they found there was no further recompense in the way of visits to Grassmere, but they still patronized Mildred to some extent, because of her continued intimacy with the family at Grassmere. Their own fashionable mothers would have gladly sacrificed some hundreds of dollars to secure the same degree of friendship which had so brightened and stimulated Mildred's life, and which had dropped down to her like some mysterious gift from the clouds. The two girls, along with others of their schoolmates, used to speculate on the strangeness of the friendship that had sprung up between Douglass, his mother, and the humble dwellers in No. 6 Mulberry Street; but it was a mystery that always baffled their powers to penetrate. Beth used to reiterate that it was not natural.

"It is just like what happens in story-books; and anyway, Mildred isn't like other girls. She's religious; and I guess the Lord does more for that kind. Its only natural He should," she remarked, one luncheon-hour, while they discussed the interesting, though very perplexing question. Another thoughtful girl, well-read in Sunday-school literature, objected to Beth's theory. Her researches on the

subject of goodness and its rewards had, for the most part, been of a doleful nature, until near the end of the book, when everything turned out satisfactorily.

"But Mildred is pretty good to begin with," Beth assured them. "She makes her own prayers, and Grace told me once that she prayed for us, too; and then she is going to be a missionary among the cannibals, so she has to get her good things now, and I don't mean to envy her any more if I can help it."

"Why, the idea that you should envy her!" Connie said, with fine scorn.

"Yes, I do, and so do you," Beth said, firmly. "We wouldn't talk so much about her going to Grassmere and getting on so well with her lessons, if we didn't. We wouldn't try so hard to find out when she goes out there. I declare, Connie De Smythe, you walk out that road nearly every Saturday afternoon just to see, and I go with you for the same reason; and we are both as cross as bears if we see her going there. I do believe we are a real mean, envious lot, and I am ever so much ashamed of myself."

"I should think you ought to be," Connie said

contemptuously, "if you are envious of a sewing-woman's weazened-faced daughter."

Whereupon there ensued a very lively conversation between the crowd of school-girls, which ended in a general estrangement, lasting for several days, with much passing to and fro of youthful tale-bearers, with sorrow and vindictiveness generally. There may have resulted some trifling benefit to poor Beth, as all honest confessions of sin with hearty resolve to forsake them must do, since she straightway went to Mildred, entering into a compact with her for life-long friendship, which continued without serious fracture for three whole weeks, only to be interrupted at the end of that time by Connie, who really cared more for Beth than for any one else in the world, and could not endure having Mildred loved better than herself. Connie was a fine strategist, and she soon found a way to supplant Mildred, whose scheming faculties were scarcely superior to a mole's. The latter grieved silently over Beth's defection and broken troth, while she almost wished the time had come that she might leave for her cannibals, since there, whatever her other heart-aches, there could not possibly be such a thing as shattered friendship.

She was slow to learn what an uncertain thing average human friendship is, nor how sadly human nature was broken in the fall in Eden. Only here and there, scattered at wide intervals among our acquaintances, do we find a shining specimen of humanity, who has been but lightly injured by this Adamic taint. To hold such a one as a steady, life-long friend surpasses in some respects the possession of another Kohinoor; since the latter must perish amid the wreck of worlds, while the former may run parallel with the eternities. •

The estrangement of her schoolmates was not of a sufficiently tragic nature to interfere with Mildred's studies. Reflections respecting it occupied a portion of her nightly vigils, along with castle-building and star-gazing. Girl-philosopher that she was fast becoming, she sagely reckoned that a thing so brittle as friendship, and once broken the cause of so much pain, was hardly worth the labor of cultivation; and so she resolved to seek her best of thought and companionship within herself, in books, the fair fount of Nature in her multitudinous forms, and, best of all, in Him whose hands fashioned her, as well as the great suns and systems that she was reading about now

so diligently out of study-hours, and which by turns charmed and baffled her, but thereby widening her mental horizon vastly; for who, in the dawn of thought and fancy, can learn of the infinitely great or small of creation, as revealed by telescope and microscope, without a widening of their mental faculties? As she read and dimly comprehended the descriptions of star-clusters and nebulae, each of them excelling in extent and brilliancy our own planet, amazement took the place of ignorance. Their huge city appeared on the map a little round dot no larger than a punctuation mark. Comparing this with the whole continent, and then with the world at large, she tried to grasp the size of the earth, and further, to compare that with a sun or star system. But her head throbbed, and imagination grew faint, while for a time herself and schoolmates and all the limited circle of her acquaintance assumed painfully small proportions. However, it helped her to bear with some philosophy the rebuffs and slights dealt out to her by her schoolmates in no stinted measure. Beth and Connie had confided to their particular friends Paul's excellent appreciation of boned turkey and ham-sandwiches, and the rarity such edi-

bles were in Mildred's home — even roast beef and bacon being scarce, so Paul had assured them.

"Why, they are almost charity people," Beth used to affirm, when feeling specially out of sorts with Mildred. "I wonder what the Everetts can see in them?" But neither she nor any of her friends could get a satisfactory reply to her query. Paul and Grace began to take turns now in keeping house, so that Mildred used to accompany her mother to the Sunday-school. Mrs. Kent believed her daughter's influence would be a help to the children, whose types of youthful character were all sadly marred by evil association. And for Mildred there was a peculiar fascination in watching these untrained youth; Betsy Jones, particularly, interested her — the interest at times strongly mixed with annoyance. Next to Mrs. Kent, Betsy felt herself to be the most important member of the school, and assumed superior airs with Mr. Felton himself; but that near-sighted, simple-minded gentleman never recognized the fact. Betsy took particular pains to snub Mildred in regard to her singing. She could not calmly accept a rival; and although she assured the children that Mildred Kent could not sing worth a cent, yet she usually experienced a jealous pang when she heard

the soft, musical voice singing in a solo. Her own voice had twice the volume, if only she was permitted to use it; but Mildred's voice had a sweetness of expression that even Tommy Tuffts recognized and tried to describe in his inarticulate way to Betsy, giving her to understand that he liked it vastly better than all the noise she could make. Betsy shook him, at the same time assuring him that, with his eyes, he couldn't judge anything correctly.

"I don't hear with my eyes," he retorted, wishing very much he could shake her.

"I guess you're alike inside and out — crooked all over."

"When I'm a man I'll pay you up, see if I don't."

"You'll never be a real man, no matter how old you are. I'd advise you, Tommy Tuffts, not to set up for a judge of singing, or anything else. You need all the sense you have to mind your own affairs."

Tommy was forced to acquiesce, but he took his revenge in gazing with apparent admiration at Mildred while she sang, if Betsy chanced to be looking, and in this way served as a Mordecai at her gate, whenever Mildred was at the school.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE SPEAK GATHERED.

DOUGLASS EVERETT took leave finally of the Park Avenue School when the mid-summer holidays began. He was now sufficiently advanced in his studies to enter college, and mother and son would soon be compelled to forego the dear companionship existing since his babyhood. He knew she shrank from the separation, but with a boy's eagerness to go out into the broader life, it was natural he should anticipate the change with more satisfaction than pain. He was ambitious to be something himself, independently of what his ancestors had done for him. He knew he was one day to be a very rich man, but his mother had so nicely guided his instincts, that he

was eager to accomplish something better than the mere spending of money he did nothing to accumulate. Many a long hour he and his mother had speculated as to what his life-work should be, but neither of them had yet been able satisfactorily to decide. Her counsel was that he should fit himself for any work by having every faculty thoroughly trained, and then look to God for guidance. Douglass tried to submit to this decision with what patience he could command; he longed, however, to know what his work should be, and often envied other lads who seemed to know directly what path lay before them among the world's workers. Of one thing, however, he determined to make sure. He studied as hard as if his school-privileges were as uncertain and difficult as the poorest country lad's who feels the fluttering of a noble, caged soul, and longs to give it room. He could learn readily, and without much effort led in his classes; but in his despairing moods—and he frequently had these, which appear to be the inevitable lot of every highly gifted soul—he reckoned it no sign that he possessed gifts above mediocrity to be able to do this. He feared that, after all his efforts, his might be only a common, receptive intellect, that takes

in other men's thoughts and the secrets of the universe, so far as others had discovered them, much as the sponge takes in water, but lacking that divine creative power, the inheritance of so few, and which, for want of a better word, men call genius. If so, might it not be as well, he reasoned, for him to enjoy the good things so plentifully provided by industrious ancestors, and cease struggling for what lay outside his strongest endeavors? But these thoughts, though forcing a lodgment in his brain, were powerless to weaken his determination at least to make the effort to be something better than a blot on Creation's face, as all idlers certainly are. Stars and animalculæ alike fulfil the object of their Creator's intention, as well as all intermediate existences, so far as we know of these, man alone excepted.

While his mother conversed with him respecting the work accomplished by those who most fill the world's eye in the best sense, at the present day, and some of whom he had himself met near or remotely in their journeyings in Europe and America, he felt his pulses tingle and his ambitions stirred to take his place one day as a peer among the best. His mother noted the flash of his eye

and indulged in her own dreams for her boy's future. A rarely-gifted and cultured woman, she felt encouraged, aside from the partial mother-love, to hope that Douglass had received as his birthright gifts infinitely richer than beautiful Grassmere and the additional wealth that, with judicious care, might outlast a dozen generations. It would be strange if the son of such a mother, so carefully trained, his best instincts constantly encouraged, should disappoint his mother's hopes. For more than three thousand years the promise has stood for the encouragement of parents that children rightly trained would not in after years depart from it. Mrs. Everett accepted that promise as true, and acted accordingly; and it was not the lad's intellectual powers alone that she endeavored to have highly developed.

Years before, when Death stepped across the threshold of Grassmere and took from her, at a stroke, the light of her eyes, beside her husband's dying pillow she brought her breaking heart to the compassionate Christ, with her babe and her worldly possessions. Unlike many others who receive the consolation in bitter woe that He gives, and when the aftertide of peace comes forget the Friend who

brought relief, she never forgot whose she was; and as the years flowed across the rent in her life and partially healed it, there was a growing intimacy between herself and the Master, until her character, naturally gentle and self-repressed, matured into one of the fairest usually seen in this lapsed world. She had early impressed on her boy's mind the great honor God condescends to bestow on any who will accept the gift. Unlike most, she emphasized the honor God confers by adopting us as children, and not, as is indirectly implied, the honor we confer on Him by giving ourselves into His keeping. She tried to uplift her son's conceptions of the Deity, and to have his first thoughts of God as a being wonderously glorious and honorable, exalted far above everything within human conception. There was nothing apologetic in her attitude towards religion when in the society of her most worldly acquaintances. The least spiritual could not fail to realize that her religion was no mere cloak, serving as a wrap to conceal the darker workings of her soul, but a part of herself, so inwrought with the fibres of her spiritual being that it would be impossible to conceive of her as other than a disciple of the meek Saviour who taught

His followers amid the hills and valleys of Palestine.

Living in the world, associating intimately with the rich and great, she was yet not of it. There was nothing of the ascetic in her nature, no morbid shrinking from contact with any phase of life. She loved her fellow-creatures, and delighted to make the favorites of fortune happy, as well as those whose path lay in the humble vale of poverty and care. She reckoned, no doubt very justly, that with either class there was more or less acquaintance with the bitternesses of life,—the rich requiring her sympathy quite as intensely as the poor, their mill-stones, having less to grind, turning on the sated heart. She set herself now, in the few weeks left to her of her son's stay at home, to crowd into that brief space all the pleasure possible. Grassmere was turned into a regular caravanary with the coming and departing guests. The fountains were sparkling their brightest in the hot midsummer air, the flowers shedding their fragrance with a prodigality in which, no doubt, birds and bees, as well as human creatures, revelled; the still, white statues in their rigid, marble attitudes no longer looking chill and uncomfortable amid the

sunbeams and blossoms. Busy people, whose lots were cast amid ceaseless activities, paused here for a brief breathing-spell, and let gentle thoughts of heaven and the long rest of eternity fall like soothing balm on their spirits, and then carrying away with them amid the rush and din of daily care hallowed memories of the saintly mistress of Grassmere, who placed service and love for Christ before everything. Other souls, too, who knew little of the luxuries and refinements that may be used as helpful ministries, were led to think of that country where they too might revel amid all perfect things.

With the natural impatience of youth, Douglass used sometimes to get tired of some of his mother's guests, and would have chosen more of solitude with her alone. It was quite natural that he should get wearied of the little thrills of ecstasy of prim maidens long past their prime, but who clung to youth and its ways, often caricaturing the latter, or of doleful widows, who had not learned his mother's happy art of forgetting their own selfish grief in making others glad. But there was one gathering in those last few weeks at Grassmere that, from its very oddity, he enjoyed so much

that it made him forget a good many other uncongenial social experiences. At last Mildred came home from St. Malachi's school with such a radiant countenance that Paul inquired if she had met an angel.

"Yes, we had one at school to-day; and I have almost felt as if I was in heaven ever since."

"Did she have on a crown?" Grace asked, her face alight with radiant expectation.

"Not that we could see."

"And was her white robe just muslin, or was it nicer than silk or satin, and the wings and everything just like all the other angels?"

"She won't get all those things till she dies."

"Why, angels don't die."

"It was only Mrs. Everett," Paul said loftily.

"You will say she is worth more to us than a good many angels, when I tell you what she told us to-day. She and Douglass were at school; and Mr. Felton and mamma, and all the school are invited out to Grassmere on Tuesday; and we are going to have tea in a summer-house, and music, and a sail on the lake, and all the flowers we can pick."

Gracie's face turned pale and then pink. She

was scarcely less shy than when she first made Douglas's acquaintance, when she peeped at him from behind a chair; and her heart fluttered at the prospect of seeing that beautiful place the children had talked so much about; and alas, seeing so many strangers at the same time; but she resolved to go and be as brave as Paul.

Jack Carver called that evening to walk to church with Mrs. Kent. He was a very regular worshipper now, but only on rare occasions went with Mrs. Kent. He was growing rapidly, and being bright and active, earned many a dollar that few knew of but himself, so that he was able to dress respectably. And now, instead of buying trashy literature, he expended his spare cash in what was useful, occasionally buying a good book, but relying mainly on the public libraries for his mental food. He attended night-school, and though he occasionally nodded over his lessons after a specially busy day, he was amassing a considerable fund of useful knowledge, so that Mrs. Kent began to feel as proud of him as if she had really some private interest in him. He came that evening more particularly to talk over with Mildred the day's pleasuring they were to have at Grass-

mere, for he was as gratified at the prospect as any of the young people; but he had fully decided that his step-mother's family were none of them to be represented there. Adeline had heard them talking, but she did not understand about it with sufficient distinctness to enlighten her mother on the subject; and none of the other school-children were anxious to have her know about it, lest she might continue her criticisms of Mrs. Everett's costumes or premises. Her mother would, no doubt, pour out all her vials of indignation on Jack's head, so far as she was allowed to do, when she discovered how her precious child had been cheated; but Jack was developing into such a manly youth that he was pretty well out of reach of his mother's wrath.

As he sat with Mildred, in the peaceful hush of the Sabbath even-tide, — Paul and Grace turning over quietly the leaves of the great family Bible and making their quaint remarks on the pictured faces of the prophets and kings, with Mildred sitting in the open window wistfully looking into the still depths of the summer sky, as if her heart had a homesick longing to plunge into its mysterious depths and pierce the secrets of the to-morrow

of Death, he vaguely wondered why his own home could not be as refined and happy; the difference, he decided, was altogether in the women-folk of the two households; for the money expenditure was much heavier in his own home than this. Mrs. Kent flitted softly to and fro, her presence almost as noiseless and fully as beneficent there as the sunlight. He would have reckoned himself rich, indeed, if he could get his home and kindred at once transformed into an exact likeness of these. As Mildred sat thinking over their visit to Grassmere, of which they had just been so eagerly talking, a shadow stole over her spirits while she looked around on the humble room and out on their bit of garden in front, with its feeble buttercups and disheartened-looking dandelions, comparing them with the roses, lilies, geraniums, and other choice plants preparing now to fall asleep in the heavily perfumed air at Grassmere; while in the lofty rooms, where high-bred people were passing to and fro amid the pictures and elegant furnishings, she could almost hear in imagination the delicious strains from the music-room, where no doubt at this hour Mrs. Everett, or some musical friend, was engaged in creating harmonies.

Presently Mrs. Kent and Jack left for church; and then the children's prayers were said, and they were soon straying amid the tantalizing realms of dreamland, when Mildred again took her place by the open window and sat dreaming her own dreams, while she half-consciously watched the sun's last stray beams following hard after their departing companions, to cheer other hearts and spaces; and the stars took up their shining,—her own particular star looking down at her, she fancied, like one of the angels of God endeavoring to uplift her from the touch of earth and selfishness. Her mind was busy,—not merely engaged in luxurious reverie, but in earnest, painful thinking that left her brain throbbing and weary. She remembered the aspect Jack Carver's home presented when she went there not long ago to see a child they thought would die, and even the memory made her shudder. She recalled the look of admiration depicted on his face when he glanced around at the comforts of her own home, while conscience whispered "what if she had to live with the Carvers and call that coarse, hard-featured woman mother, and share the disordered home with those terrible children!" Humbled at

remembrance of her dissatisfied fancies a few moments before, she knelt by her chair and asked God to forgive her for indulging ever in repining thoughts, and again asked Him to take her and give her what was best, and let her work for Him somewhere. She arose from her knees, and, lifting her eyes again to the bright shining of the stars, she tried to look past them to heaven itself, somewhere, she believed, in those far depths of space, where God is amid the splendors of His throne-room and the glorious ranks of shining ones — yet bending His ear to listen to her humble cry. A feeling of awe, so deep that it reached to pain, came over her while she reflected that only a moment before she had conversed with this mighty Being, but, — and at the thought her heart stilled its frightened beating, — the Christ who died for her was sitting there — God with God.

Her mother came home, too, that night, in a very grateful mood, for there had been a meeting of very unusual power, and Jack Carver had stood up for prayers and on the way confessed that for many weeks he had found the burden of his sins heavier than he could bear.

"It was one Sunday when you were talking to

us about eternity," he said to Mrs. Kent, "how long it was, and what a little thing might keep us from spending it with Christ. If you remember, you talked to us a lot about Him, what pain He endured to have us live with Him forever; and now, although He receives such honor from all His saints and angels, He listens to our faintest request for mercy and pity. Ever since I've seemed to see Him listening for me to come. To-night I forgot about eternity, and those awful things I've had such a horror of, and I just seemed to see Christ with the blood on His hands waiting to blot out my sins. How I wish He'd give me a chance to tell Him that I am grateful for what He has done for me. You see, I can tell you what I think of what you have done for me, and maybe I'll have a chance some day to do something for you; but it's different with Him. He is so rich and great, He don't need the help of a poor boy like me; there are so many in heaven and on earth praising Him, I am of no account at all, no more than one of the sparrows hopping around on the street."

Mrs. Kent's eyes were full of happy tears, while Jack poured out breathlessly his story. All the

pleasure-seekers in the world could not conceive her joy, as she stood in the mist of the starlight with Jack's form dimly outlined, his quivering features quite in the shadow, and talked to him of his new-found Friend; for on their slow homeward way, the boy had laid hold of the mystery of faith and accepted Christ for his atonement.

"God provides work for every one ready and willing to do it. You will have opportunity every day of proving your fealty to Him. You can begin right at once in your own home."

"Any other place would be easier than that," was the answer, rather hopelessly given.

"We are not to choose our work. No wise parent does that with children, and we are only children of a larger growth; very often willful and hard to teach in Christ's school. If you win one of your own family for Heaven, what a success your life will be! I have always dreaded the thought of going there alone."

"But you need not do that any longer. I shall be your boy there, and I am so glad to belong to you in some way—the only mother I have ever known."

There was a quiver in Jack's voice, though the

friendly night concealed the tears that stood in his eyes.

"Good-night, Jack." Mrs. Kent spoke softly. He knew she spoke through tears, while the touch of her hand on his shoulder was the most like a caress his hungry heart ever knew before.

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CHAPTER XXII.

DOUBTING CASTLE.

JACK presented himself at No. 6 Mulberry Street very promptly on Monday evening. Mrs. Kent saw that his face looked troubled; but after a while he began to look happier, as they sat in the twilight singing, while Mildred played some of the old majestic tunes — the legacy to the Christian church of some of the masters of musical composition. He had a fine soprano voice that might, in a few years, develop into an equally good tenor or baritone; and Mrs. Kent had endeavored to cultivate his taste by introducing him, so far as she was capable, to the more advanced compositions of sacred music. Mildred had a decided taste for classic music, and under her moth-

er's painstaking instruction, since she was able to sit at the harmonium, she was now enabled to extract, especially in inspired moments, a good degree of harmony from Mozart's masses and the hymns of the Bachs, and some others of the older composers, whose works had come to her mother through a musical grandmother long since passed to the world where music may appeal to other senses than those of hearing. At last the twilight had so far faded that Mildred could no longer distinguish the notes; when she had ceased playing, and the two children, tired with the long day's play, had nearly sung themselves to sleep, Mrs. Kent laid away her work and put them to bed, while Mildred, going to the open window, sat watching the sky with the loving wistfulness Jack had so often noticed before. Getting tired of the silence he said, at last: "I believe you are homesick to get up there."

"Oh, no, I want to live on this earth a great many more years. I expect the people up there are far happier than we are; but I cannot see how they have the same chance to work and make others better and happier as we have down here."

"Is that what you want to live for?"

"One of the things," she said, timidly. "There will be such a long time to go around among the stars and learn their histories, and to get acquainted with all the great people, that I don't feel in any hurry to begin."

"Yes, and one has to die to get there; and that is anything but a good outlook. Besides, if we should find at last that it was all a mistake."

"Oh, Jack, we can never do that. It is just as true and real as this world."

"Lots of wise men don't think so."

"I never knew that anyone thought there was a doubt. I would rather never have existed at all than to be put out like a candle when I die." There was such pain in her voice that Jack regretted that he had spoken his own despairing doubts.

"What are you speaking about so dolefully?" Mrs. Kent asked as she came into the room. They were both silent, and she asked again.

"Jack says maybe there is no Heaven, or life after this is done. He says some wise men believe so."

"Why, Jack, have you so soon got into Doubting Castle?" Mrs. Kent asked cheerily, as if that were not matter for surprise, however.

"I don't know where I have got, but it is not the sort of place I was in last night."

"What has gone wrong with you to-day?"

"It is no use for me to try to be a Christian. I can't and live there."

"God never puts us in any places, Jack, where it is impossible to serve him,—not even the palaces of the rich and great, where probably it is the very hardest to follow and serve Him."

"There couldn't be any place harder than with my step-mother and her children. You have no idea of what it is," he continued despairingly.

"Never mind, Jack, you will soon be old enough to get a wife and home of your own," Mildred said encouragingly.

"I believe I'll let women alone when I'm a man; not but I'd like them, if they were all like you," he said, with a faint attempt at cheerfulness, turning to Mrs. Kent.

"The most of them, I think, are nice, and they try to make their families comfortable and happy," Mildred said, reassuringly.

"One would think you belonged to some different order of beings, you speak so impersonally."

"Well, mamma, I am not a woman. Think of all the days that must come and go first."

"But they will all be gone some day, and your turn to have a house of your own and husband to make happy will come at last," Jack said, not very joyously.

"I don't much expect to get married. That will not be in my way of life," she replied with perfect seriousness.

"It is altogether too soon for you to be speculating about such things," rejoined Mrs. Kent. "Marriage is a very solemn undertaking and children should not forecast such vague possibilities. Live each day wisely, making the best of its opportunities, and leave an uncertain future alone."

"But we may talk about Grassmere. Saturday is not really the future."

Her mother smiled at Mildred's request, and gave her consent; whereupon Mildred and Jack fell to discussing the Everetts, their home, and their unusual kindness to others.

"You will get a better idea of heaven after you have been there," Mildred assured him. "I really can't realize that I shall have such a home as that

when I die. I like to alter those words, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.' I always make it, 'In my Father's country are many mansions.' I expect it is just the same, and it seems to read better. I wonder poor people are not more anxious to die; but one day I was talking about it to Mr. Felton, and he said poor people love their lives as much as the rich; but many of them don't make any reckoning about heaven at all. I cannot understand it."

"The poor have just as good right to live as the rich," Jack asserted.

"Oh yes, but they haven't as much to live for; and then just to die, and be as rich as kings and emperors. Only think, Jack! if you were to die to-night you might be walking to-morrow on gold, and have a beautiful palace all your own, — that is, provided you were worthy of it."

"I know; but I'd rather stay a while longer in this world — now wouldn't you?" Thus directly appealed to on the subject, Mildred acknowledged she had a good deal of anxiety that day they were sailing on the lake, lest the bottom might happen to slip out of the boat; for the sky just then looked too deep and solemn to feel like plunging into it suddenly.

"Yes, I guess most people would sooner live than die any time, except when they are very sick, or have great trouble."

"I wonder if God likes us to suffer and be sad-hearted," Mildred said reflectively.

"I can't say. Maybe it's good for us, makes us pure, like the big storms do the atmosphere." Jack was trying to comfort his heart with the thought that his own trials might be a gain in the end.

"I have read a great deal about it in the Bible, and when things have been trying at school, I found it a comfort to read about Moses and Elijah, and the other witnesses, as St. Paul calls them. I have often sat at my desk and said over that verse, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' until I wouldn't mind things very much."

"What things?" Jack asked curiously.

Mildred cast a quick look at her mother, to see if she was listening, but she seemed absorbed in a rich dinner-dress she was making for one of her patronesses.

"You see, I am the only really poor scholar at the Park Avenue School. The others live in fine houses, and keep servants, and have parties, and their mothers go calling and have receptions." Mildred enumerated their advantages in a low, rapid voice, as if she had gone over them so many times she knew them all by heart.

"Yes, I understand how it is," Jack said slowly. "Their fathers do big businesses, and then go all to smash, and begin again pretty much where they left off; pay thirty or forty cents on the dollar, and cheat folks out of the rest. Them people are no better, really, than beggars. They get from others what they have never earned; and then they call that respectable. I guess them that sees the wrong side and the right have another name for such things,—I mean the angels," he added, by way of explanation.

"What name?" Mildred asked eagerly.

"Stealing," he said, with keen, boyish scorn.

"But they pay back the other sixty cents when they make more money." Mildred's tone was slightly reproving.

"About one in a thousand, maybe. I never heard tell of but two that did it, and that was long ago;

but my! their families turned out well," he said admiringly, as if the honorable fathers got their recompense in a noble posterity.

Mildred sat thinking for a good while, but Jack could detect no gleam of elation brightening her face, as he had expected. It did not seem to give her an ignoble satisfaction to know that some of her schoolmates had a support really more degrading than pauperism, their beautiful homes and pretty garments secured at the loss of their parents' honor. She breathed a long sigh. "It's a curious world, Jack, and things are very badly twisted. Don't you think it would be better if people didn't crowd together so,—if there were more country places and not such big cities?"

"I know I wish I had a farm, with trees and horses," Jack said, in a tone of voice that proved the genuineness of his words.

"There are millions of acres yet that no one gets any good from,—plenty for everyone to grow his own wheat and potatoes on, and have cattle besides. I think dumb creatures are sometimes better society than certain human beings. They really seem more refined and respectable than wicked, dirty people you meet on the streets."

Jack's face flushed uncomfortably at Mildred's words, for he thought instantly of the poor specimens of humanity which it had been his lot to herd among; his own flesh and blood he remembered with a pang.

"But the dumb creatures are far below the very poorest, lowest specimens of human beings," he remonstrated. "They won't live forever."

"But the dumb animals are just as God made them, and the human beings are far worse. A horse like Cadmor seems far higher and nobler than a man like old Shuffler, who lives up your alley."

"I have heard father say he was a fine-looking man once. He was brought up in a rich home; but he drank, and has gone through with a fortune long ago."

"The children on the street now call him names and mimic him," Mildred continued sorrowfully.

"But he don't mind if he can only get his grog," Jack said very cheerfully, glad at the turn the conversation had taken.

Mrs. Kent ceased working now for the night, and, folding away the silk-velvet gown, she came and had a long talk with Jack. His mother had been more trying than ever; his temper got be-

yond control, and words in the heat of passion had been said that had made him utterly despair of ever again trying to look to the gentle Christ for forgiveness. Mrs. Kent's face looked exceedingly sad while Jack honestly confessed all; and without saying anything to him personally she knelt down, Jack and Mildred dropping silently on their knees too, when she besought God so earnestly for pardon for the poor, tempted lad, that the tears of bitter penitence flowing from his eyes were at last succeeded by tears of joy; and when he said "good night," he went on his way rejoicing — having for the time well-nigh forgotten Doubting Castle and its misery.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAIFS AMID THE FLOWERS.

THE Saturday dawned at last brightly. So many little hearts had dreaded a rainy day, — Mildred as much as any — that when they saw the sun shining in an almost cloudless sky, they scarce knew how to contain their satisfaction. To some of them the knowledge that they were to wander at will through green fields, and see the buds and flowers really growing, was the principal attraction; to others it was the fact that they were to have a ride behind high-stepping horses in a comfortable carriage, and have a sail on the lake; while others imagined nothing could be better than the toothsome dainties with which they expected to be regaled, with glimpses caught of splendid rooms with all their beauty of adornment.

Betsy Jones's family decked her out in an entirely new suit of clothes, in style quite beyond her position. One of her older sisters remarked, with spiteful pride, as parents, brothers and sisters stood regarding her with admiration: "That doll-faced Kent girl'll find others can get noticed by the quality as well as her." Before the afternoon was ended, however, Betsy made the discovery that other things were essential besides fine frocks and hats to gain the affectionate regard of the favored classes.

Douglass came for Mrs. Kent and Mr. Felton, while the rest of the invited guests were taken in at St. Malachi's gate by a team sent on purpose for them. Paul, with much longing, watched the merry crowd stowing themselves into the roomy wagon, and wished his lot had been cast, for a little while, in their way. Jack was given charge to preserve order, and watch that no risks were run by too venturesome spirits — an authority the most of them were inclined to resent, since they felt equal to the task of maintaining the proprieties, and taking care of themselves as well. Betsy Jones sat in uncomfortable state, her ruffles and ribbons matters of extreme anxiety, since Tommie Tufft's

well-blackened boots kept jostling her dress on one side, while Adelphine Carver, whose mother had found out the secret and sent her along, insisted on sitting beside Betsy, and persisted in fingering her finery. To some of the little waifs the drive was one of unalloyed delight. The comfortable carriage and sleek, shining horses, the buttercups and daisies nodding at them from roadside and meadows, the trees casting their cool shadows athwart the sunbeams, and better still, the wonderland ahead, of which they had heard so much. Some of them realized all this in a dim fashion, not being capable of labeling their impressions, only dumbly experiencing an unknown joy which no doubt to some extent would remodel all their future fancies. One never can measure the influence some chance circumstance may have; and since life is mainly composed of separate events which we or our associates mainly control, we are to a considerable extent the arbiters of our own and our companions' destinies.

The carriages rolled up the long avenue with their living freight of curious-eyed children. Betsy Jones for the moment ceased to be conscious of her toilet, as she gazed at the fountain dancing in

the sunbeams, the statues gleaming amid the lilies and roses, and, beyond, the pillars and colonnades and massive proportions generally of the stately mansion looming up in the distance.

"I could 'most think it was heaven!" she ejaculated impulsively; while at the same moment Adelpine Carver turned from Betsy's entrancing ribbons, and began shrieking for some flowers. Jack cast her a despairing glance, with a suddenly clouded face, as he muttered, "There'll be no peace with you here. They wouldn't have needed any worse Satan in Eden to pester them than you."

"I expect little Cain was another such a nuisance as her," Tommy Tufts remarked, as he squinted ferociously at her.

"Much you know about the Bible, Tommy Tufts. They weren't in Eden when they had him," Betsy said loftily.

"You needn't be so smart: I didn't say they was," Tommy responded with a flourish of his feet that was particularly exasperating, and effectually banished further heavenly contemplation from Betsy's mind.

Mrs. Everett was standing on the steps waiting

to receive them, a white gown of some fleecy texture floating around her,—or so it seemed to the curious children, accustomed to motherhood clad in very sober and substantial garments; a bow of ribbon and a tiny bunch of forget-me-nots at her throat being the only colors that she wore, and making her look to Mildred like some kind, matronly angel, if such there are amid the heavenly places. Betsy Jones's eyes rested more admiringly on the tall, handsome lad, whose head was already raised a few inches above his mother's.

"Isn't that young fellow a stunner! If you could only look like him, Tommy Tufts!" Tommy breathed a deep sigh, and was silent. Betsy gave her skirts a shake, and casting over them a scrutinizing glance that was also reassuring, preceded the others up the steps, where Mrs. Everett stood smiling a gracious welcome. A general hand-shaking ensued, and before this ceremony was satisfactorily ended Adelpine Carver was among the flowers, pulling away ruthlessly, with the gardener standing guard over those he was most anxious to preserve.

Jack saw her, and slipping down, attempted to lead her away, when a shrill scream disturbed

the stillness that usually reigned at Grassmere, and Adelphine refused to be conveyed to another spot. Mildred turned with the others at the cry, and saw the look of mortification on Jack's face as he stood holding the struggling child.

"It is too bad for his afternoon to be spoiled," she said to her mother, and then went directly to him. "Adelphine generally does what I want her to. I will take charge of her for you."

Jack turned to her eagerly: "It is awfully good of you; but she will keep you from having a good time."

"I have been here before and had my share, and it is your turn now."

"She is nothing to you, that you should be pestered with her," Jack said, wishing at the same time very heartily that the mite of humanity was nothing to him either. Mildred soon had Adelphine conveyed out of harm's way, decoying her cleverly into a wide strip of meadow where, under the apple-trees, she could pick wild-flowers to her heart's content and make daisy-chains in sufficient quantity to adorn the entire Carver connection.

An hour or two later Douglass went in search of Mildred, and found her sitting on the ground

with a lap full of Adelphine's chains, which she entrusted to her for safe keeping while she continued manufacturing others. Mildred's face was turned, with a look of longing, towards the grounds whence came the gladsome shout of children at play.

"Why have you strayed off here alone?" he asked, throwing himself full length on the grass beside her.

"Jack couldn't have a good time if Adelphine was near any chance for mischief," she rather sorrowfully explained.

"Do you like being here alone?"

"I would sometimes," was the guarded reply.

"Do you to-day?"

"I enjoy seeing Jack have a good time. He very seldom has such a chance to have one like to-day."

"It is altogether for Jack's sake, then, that you have banished yourself?"

Mildred nodded her head, her eyes very persistently fixed on the daisy-chains in her lap.

"You think a great deal of Jack?"

She looked up in surprise. "I suppose I do, I never thought of it before."

"There is no one in the world, save my mother, who would make the sacrifice for me that you are doing for him this afternoon."

"I would do a great deal more than that for you if you needed it. I would love to make some great sacrifice for you," she said, with such a solemn voice that it touched a responsive chord in the lad's heart, and made him ashamed of his jealousy of poor Jack Carver, to whom Mildred's gentle kindness was one of the few glad things in his desolate existence.

"You will forget all about me when I am away; I won't see you again until Christmas."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I do not think I shall ever forget you, not even when I get away up there." She lifted her eyes to the calm heavens bending above her, no more serenely pure than they. "I have so much more to make me remember than you have," she continued, with a brave self-restraint that was pathetic. "I wonder what would have become of me at school but for you? People's hearts break sometimes, and mine felt very badly, that day."

"You must write and tell me if those selfish girls torment you again. Perhaps you will write

to me anyway?" He spoke as if a new idea had just come to him.

"If you really wish me to, I will; but I shall have nothing to tell you."

"Oh, yes, you can write about Jack Carver, and your two schools, and lots of things."

"I can't make much out of Jack, for he has mostly troubles to tell about. His step-mother is a very afflicting sort of person."

Douglass smiled. He decided that if the youthful Adelpine, who was just then pulling Mildred's hands impatiently, was a fair sample of the rest of her kin, Jack needed all the solacement Mildred could bestow.

"See here, little one! If you don't keep quiet I will do something to you that you won't very soon forget." He spoke so sternly to the belligerent Adelpine that she stood gazing at him in speechless wonder for a few seconds, her gaze met by a look in those stern, dark eyes that some day might make one made of sterner stuff than little Adelpine quail. Her lip quivered, and she was about to break forth in one of her discordant screams, when he half raised himself, looking at her with such stern command that she suddenly changed her

mind, trotting some distance off, and appeasing her wrath by a wholesale destruction of any blossoms that came within reach.

Douglass lay down again in the grass very calmly while Mildred looked first at Adelphine and then at him, with a mixture of admiration and awe. "I do not think any one ever conquered her before, and you did it so easily!"

"Never mind that little Turk; it is a sheer waste for you to lose all the afternoon with her."

"But I have not lost it. I do not think you and I ever got so well acquainted before. This is the very nicest time I have ever had at Grassmere, or anywhere. I did not know before that you really liked me. I thought it was only pity, and because you were good and noble that made you kind to me. Connie told me once you always took the part of lame kittens and things." Her face was quite radiant with the assurance that Douglass liked her for herself; for some way, without any positive assurance on his part, she felt certain now that he did.

"We are only boy and girl yet, but by and by we will be man and woman. We must still be friends then. Remember that, Mildred."



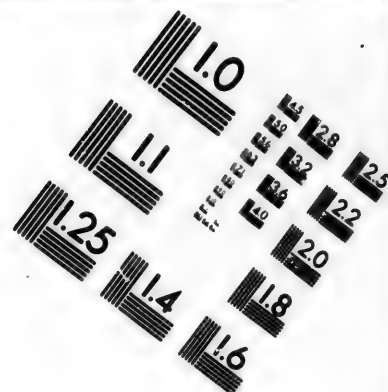
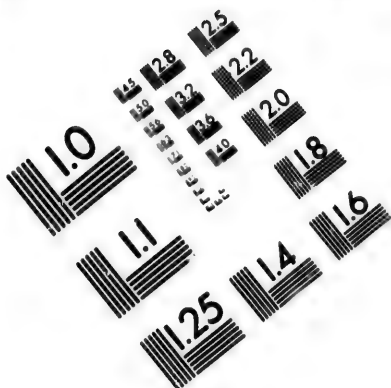
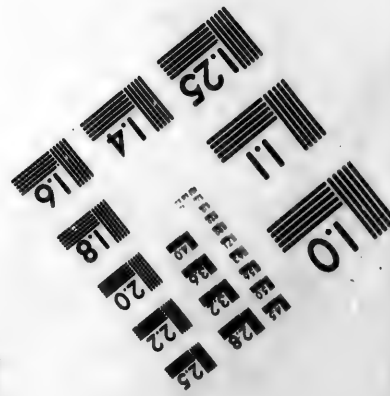
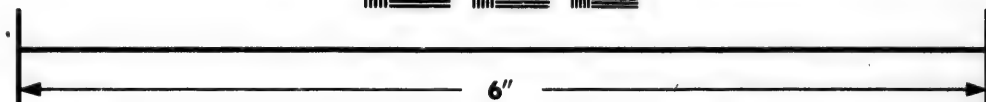
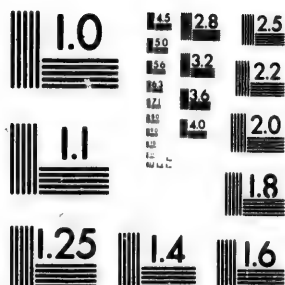


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"Yes, but maybe you will forget. I won't think it hard if you do, and I won't be surprised; for it is easier for us to be friends now,—the difference don't seem as great as it will then. You know I will be a working woman, and you a rich man with a great many friends," she added, with a catching of the breath as if the thought gave her pain.

"But, Mildred, I shall always know you are pure and true, and that God gave you the instincts of a lady, no matter how much of a working woman you may be. I do not think I shall be the first to forget."

He stood up and looked away across the meadows and beyond the trees that lay below them on the hillside towards the city, as if he was already in the far future, and mingling in the great busy world. Mildred looked up at him as some pure-faced worshipper of olden times might have gazed at the saintly face of hermit or crusader, and did not feel surprised that this richly-gifted youth so earnestly craved her enduring friendship.

"You must come away," he said, abruptly. "We will put that kitten in a box, if no other plan presents itself, and not waste all your holiday

among the buttercups. Come, we are going for a sail."

Mildred stood up obediently, calling to Adelphine to join them, and then burdened herself with the huge bunches of wild-flowers in obedience to her small tormentor, who was growing fretful already over their wilted appearance. Douglass walked beside Mildred over the springing grasses, Adelphine following disconsolately behind. She was angry, and longed to give expression to her sentiments; but a new experience had a short time before been granted her: that big fellow ahead looked so stern, she concluded her safest course was to keep quiet until she reached Jack's shelter; then she resolved they should hear from her; but fortunately it was so long before she got a glimpse of her brother, and so many other attractions presented themselves, that her tear-shedding was postponed much beyond her intentions. Not until the horses were again reined up at the door and the children climbing into the carriage, their holiday, like all sweet things, too soon ended, did Adelphine recall her usually effective powers of resistance.

"I won't go home," she screamed frantically, as Jack, with a tortured look on his face, was trying to force her into the carriage. "I want to stay

here. I shan't go, there now!" she shrieked, struggling to the ground, and rushing blindly over the flower-beds in her eagerness to escape from Jack. But her steps were suddenly arrested; for, changing to look up, there stood Douglass just before her.

"Stand still!" he said, so sternly that she paused involuntarily, and in a trice her hand was seized and held firmly until Jack came and took her, looking himself more like the culprit. Douglass walked beside him to the carriage and lifted the self-willed girl among the happy crowd, their laps and hands filled with great bunches of flowers, which Mrs. Everett had allowed them the exquisite pleasure of gathering themselves.

While Douglass was in sight, Adelphine kept her feelings well under control; but the horses' heads turned towards the gate and his face concealed, her voice could be heard across the dewy, perfumed spaces for a long way. Douglass went to the little group standing some little distance away, his fine face clouded with impatience and disgust.

"What are such creatures made for, I wonder? That boy is a martyr to her caprices and temper."

"He told me he was going to leave them, and get a home of his own, just as soon as he gets old enough," Mildred said cheerfully. She felt so rarely content, and the world and life seemed so charming, she could not well pity any one who was alive.

"I see he takes you into his confidence," Mrs. Everett said.

"We plan together what we shall do when we are grown up."

"What are you going to do? Be a great artist, I presume."

"She is going to be a missionary," Paul hastened to explain, glad of a chance to add his quota to the general fund of entertainment. "She says that maybe the savages will eat her. I would not give them a chance if I was her, would you?" he asked, turning to Douglass, who was one of the greatest heroes on earth, in Paul's eyes.

"I must confess it is not a very enticing outlook," Douglass smiled down into the eager, upturned face.

"She may change her mind before she is big enough to go," Paul said, with an air of relief.

"It is a long way over the seas. The heathens live thousands and thousands of miles away. She says we shall never see her again after she once gets started." Grace's blue eyes were filling with tears while Paul made his speech. This future career of Mildred's was a very real thing to both the children, as well as a very sad one.

"She may turn housekeeper for Jack Carver, instead. No doubt he will be very anxious to have her when he gets that separate establishment of his set up."

Mildred looked up with so much surprise, not unmingled with pain, that Douglass felt ashamed of his words, and turned to Mr. Felton, who was standing a little apart now with the ladies.

"You have a great deal to be thankful for. Compare what God has given to you with the little those children have, who to-day shared your bounty. I am not sure if I would not rather stand in Jack Carver's place in the last day than yours, if the choice were offered me, your temptations are so great."

Mr. Felton spoke with a solemnity that sobered Douglass. The poor man had been struggling with his conscience for some hours. He longed to gain

the lad's esteem; but then duty faced him sternly, making it impossible to go on smoothly talking and enjoying the charming hospitality of the gracious mistress and youthful master of Grassmere, and then to go away, possibly never again to have an opportunity to do his duty. The majestic fathers and confessors of the church of God through the centuries came out in long array, and there stood out vividly before his imagination their valorous defence of truth and answering obedience to conscience. With their lives in their hands, and before kings and emperors, they spoke the truth bravely. Should he then dare to withhold his word of counsel from this gracious lad who had been so kind? The very timidity of his nature made him speak the more sternly.

Douglass thanked him gently, saying, with boyish frankness, "Most persons flatter me, and say how they would like to change places with me. I do not think anyone, save my mother, ever spoke to me before of my danger and responsibility. I shall always think of you, Mr. Felton, and respect you for your faithfulness."

"I hope God will lead you in a path of usefulness and devotion to his cause."

"I hope He has begun so to lead me," Douglass said, in a voice so low that even Mr. Felton, who stood at his side, scarcely caught his words. It was the first time he had ever spoken of the hope to any one but his own mother; and the usual bashfulness that makes confessions so hard, made his voice tremulous; but his heart felt strangely light and glad after he had spoken. But he turned abruptly away, and went back to Mildred, who stood looking down into the heart of a magnificent lily.

"Do you think it so very perfect that you gaze at it so long?" he asked after standing in silence for a while, feeling at the same time ashamed of his last words to her, and anxious lest she might be offended. He kept judging her always by the young girls of his acquaintance.

She drew a long sigh, — whether of perfect content or sorrow he could not tell, — until a moment after she looked up in his face: "I have been wondering what our Saviour thought when he made this flower. His thoughts then must have been very beautiful, — not like those he had when he made lizards and crocodiles."

"I never imagined Him creating things," Doug-

lass said, with a sudden brightening of countenance. "I always thought God, the Father, created everything." He was struck with the unworldliness of the girl, going down so far beyond her present surroundings, and the strong fascination he knew Grassmere held for her, to speculating on the thoughts of the great Maker of all things, when some specially fine work of creation was completed. He had been blaming himself just now for troubling her with his own narrow, selfish fancies about Jack Carver, and in her strange unconsciousness of such things she had been forgetting about the both of them, her meditations taking a vastly higher range.

"Don't you think about common things, Mildred?" he asked, with a curious, boyish impatience.

"What do you call common?" she asked, a deeper tinge coming into her rose-leaf cheek.

"Oh, such things as all girls talk and think about. Do you really mean to be a missionary, as Paul says?"

"Yes, if God will let me."

"And you do not look forward then to having a nice home of your own some day, and making

some favored person perfectly happy with your loving care?"

"I expect missionaries have little homes of their own, and they can make such lots of poor people happy. Have you never read particularly about them?" She looked up timidly, but with surprise at his unexpected ignorance of such high matters.

"Oh, yes, I have read about them, certainly; but I shall take more interest in them after this if you are going to join them by-and-by."

"If you would wait until then, I could write such lovely letters," she said, rather too eagerly; the correspondence Douglass had spoken of was already weighing on her mind, for how could she frame a letter that a young man at college would have patience to read?

"If you were thousands and thousands of miles away, as Paul says, I do not think I would have much heart to write to you; you would seem to me then like the angels away above us." He glanced up at the far purpling depths where the stars were modestly taking their places along the welkin.

"Would you like that flower?" he asked, sud-

denly turning the conversation. "Shall I pick it for you?"

"I had rather not," she said, laying her hand on his arm as he reached forth to pluck it. "I will like to think of it as mine if you will give it to me, but still living and growing here. I think I can keep it mine until the snow comes. You know I won't see Grassmere again very soon, perhaps never, for you will be too much of a man next year to think about us children." She gave her head a pathetic little nod, and then swept a wide, loving glance over all the fair landscape on which the twilight shadows were fast deepening.

In a short time the carriage was waiting for them, and Mr. Felton and Mrs. Kent and the children said good-bye; and at Mr. Felton's request the coachman drove them slowly home through the gathering night-shadows.

"The day has been so perfect," he said dreamily, "I would like to lengthen it out as long as possible. We workers do not have too many such seasons as this."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

PORTRAIT-PAINTING.

THE holidays ended, Mildred returned with much eagerness to the Park Avenue School for her second year. Her mother no longer needed to practise such stern economy, for she was becoming well known as a highly skilled needle-woman.

If it was necessary to work very often from dawn to sunset of a long summer's day, she always had her work now at home in her own well-aired and sunny rooms, with her bright-faced, cheerful children for companions. Mildred now was able to wear whole shoes and garments made out of good material, so that she no longer expected to be subjected to the martyrdom of shabby clothes, with

outspoken criticisms thereon by sarcastic school-mates; but she found, after all, that her return to school had its measure of desolation. There was no one henceforth to stand between her and impertinent schoolfellows. They could sneer at her mother's humble calling and her own lowly position in society without let or hindrance from the one who had hitherto shielded her. As Mildred returned that evening along the hot, dusty streets, she wished one's education could be picked up in the happy fashion that the robins and bobolinks get their training for a life of usefulness; and it must be confessed she looked forward with a strong measure of desire for the time to come when she should slip away from the environments of our high civilization to the dark-skinned tribes whose keenest recollections of each other's ancestors would probably be how they tasted after a careful and judicious roasting.

"But I expect their great-grandchildren will taunt each other after I am dead and gone for not being as rich or well connected as they are," she said to herself, with a sorrowful regret that human nature was naturally so very cruel; while she wondered if it was really worth while intro-

ducing among the ignorant tribes of heathendom the defects of our splendid civilization, since the good and evil go hand in hand mostly. "I am surprised that things don't get wound up and the world made over again," she said to herself at last, very wearily.

As she turned into the school-yard gate that morning, she saw Connie De Smythe a little way off, stepping along in a very stylish new suit. Mildred went to her, pleased to be with her old playfellow again; but Connie met her icily, and scarcely responded to her greetings. Mildred turned away and did not attempt any further overtures at friendliness, but entered the school-house alone. She hung her hat and lunch-basket in the cloak-room, and then sat down at her desk with a set, resolute look on the usually patient face. Down in her still, strong nature a new resolution sprang into life. Some day, in this or some other world, she would prove to Connie De Smythe, and all the unkind crowd of haughty schoolmates, that she was their equal, as God reckons equality. She took out her books and set her desk in order,—a fly droning on the window near by the only living presence in the room

whose voice was within the compass of her hearing. It soothed at last the commotion in her heart, as she sat looking up at its vain attempt to penetrate the glass and gain the freedom of the outside world. "Everything alive must have its limitations and perplexities; not anything or anybody, from the fly on the window to the queen on her throne, is perfectly happy," she said to herself, trying to console herself with the reflection. Her drawing-teacher, Miss Leslie, came in, and seeing Mildred alone, came and stood beside her.

"I am glad to see you here," she said very kindly. "I expect these little fingers will accomplish some excellent work in my department this year."

Mildred's face looked brighter, while the thought suddenly came to her that she might find a companionship more assured in her studies, and more particularly in her drawing-lessons.

"I am going to do my best," she said quietly. "One don't get disappointed in these things, as they do in human beings."

"I am not sure of that. Very few persons get their ideals satisfied in art, any more than in humanity."

"But duty is always the same, while people are

sometimes very kind, and at others they will hardly speak to you,—at least, that is the way with girls."

"And the girl is mother to the woman. Human nature, unassisted by Divine grace, does not outgrow its early defects, as a rule. Our wisest plan is not to expect much from anything that belongs to this world solely; if we do, life is certain to be one continued round of disappointments."

Mildred looked up quickly: "But there are people who find things to their minds. The rich girls have everything they want."

"Study their faces closely, Mildred, and see if they look happier than others not so highly blessed by fortune. I have thought for a good many years that the rich get really the least good out of life; that is, the ill-trained money-holders. They do not know how to use their possessions wisely, and they have the unrest of idleness, with the terror of having at last to face death when they will be stripped of all their enjoyments."

"If we have our best treasures within ourselves, Death can never rob us," Mildred said reflectively. "We can carry our knowledge and the joy it brings us into other worlds, if we love God."

"You are young to learn that. Have you discovered the secret of loving Him?" Miss Leslie asked, with surprise.

"I believe He gave me a new heart last winter," Mildred said gently.

"Then you need not mind the indifference of school-fellows, or the scorn of the world, or life's miseries generally. The young have usually a good many of the latter."

"I try not to, but one likes the pleasures we get from both worlds."

"You must think a great deal for one so young."

"Perhaps I do. I never went to school until last year."

The teacher smiled. "You are not complimentary to the schools. We generally suppose they are to waken and stimulate thought; but we will talk over these knotty subjects by-and-by. I am very glad you are coming into my class this year as a regular student."

"I am more glad than you can be; for you do not treat me as the other teachers."

The lady smiled again at Mildred's frank words, but she understood her reference to the other teachers. She had ideas of her own respecting the rela-

tions existing between teacher and pupil. She had never found that in treating the latter as perfect equals they had presumed on the concession generously given.

After this, Mildred made no further advances to Connie or any of her schoolmates. Without any words on her part she felt instinctively from their attitude that it would only end painfully; and, taking Connie's rebuff as the final decision of all, she shrank altogether within herself until at last she was regarded among the others as little more of a personality than their own shadows. The children at home for a while asked why Beth and Connie no longer came; but Mildred's answers were not effusive, and soon they ceased to mention them. The days and weeks slipped by, not so joyously, it is true, as they might have done for the solitary child; but the discipline was, no doubt, of itself an educator. Her mind was cast on its own internal resources for companionship, and thus it became more active and intense in its operations, while every faculty was at the highest tension.

Her mother was not ignorant of the isolated position Mildred occupied in the school, — not from anything she said, however, but from her very si-

lence in regard to them; but as she usually maintained a quiet cheerfulness, and her health was certainly not being injured, as she had never been more robust, she concluded it was wisest to keep silence herself on the matter, and let her remain at school until she graduated.

The weeks wore on with such even monotony that Mildred, absorbed in her studies, scarcely noticed their flight until the air was beginning to grow chill, and a few stray snowflakes heralded the grand army rapidly approaching; while from every group of school-fellows she heard mention made of what they were going to have or do on Thanksgiving Day. Her own mother still kept up in her family the old English custom of celebrating Christmas as the chief gala-day of the entire year, and had not yet caught the infection of American Thanksgiving rejoicings. But Mildred fell to thinking about it, and made up her mind finally that she had a very just right to observe the day, for she had certainly great cause for thankfulness; while she felt a desire throbbing restlessly in her heart to include some one else, not so richly blessed as herself, in her sacrifices of gratitude. She became daily more anxious to earn some money, so that

she might help Jack Carver and a few others to be thankful with her. Her portrait-painting had died a natural death from the lack of patrons, but she concluded to try once more. So choosing one of the faces among her daily companions that she liked best, she set herself with all diligence to reproduce it on paper. Finished at last, she took it to her teacher for inspection, asking timidly if it was worth any money at all. Miss Leslie took it with a humorous gleam on her usually sober face. "Is it possible you are so ambitious as to turn portrait-painter?" she asked, unrolling the picture for inspection; but as she looked her expression changed, and Mildred's turn for surprise came while she listened to the words of commendation that fell impulsively from her teacher.

"Is this your first attempt?" she asked.

"Oh, no, I have been taking likenesses for years."

"But an old artist might envy you the soul you have put into that face. Magdalene Grant will never look so thoughtful as that,—it flatters her."

"That is a trouble I always have with them. I give my portraits a better look out of their eyes

than they really have. Perhaps I paint the soul, as it might be if they were always good."

"Why, Mildred, surely you don't try to paint the soul."

"Yes, that is why I like human beings' portraits better than those of cows and other animals; besides, I see very little of animals,—only dogs and horses on the street—and one don't care for only bones and hair."

"What strange thoughts you have, Mildred!" Then, after a pause, she added: "You should be a famous painter some day if you make up your mind to hard work. I could not do anything equal to that, if I tried for years."

"Oh, Miss Leslie!" Mildred gave her teacher a look of pained surprise, and then burst into tears.

"Why do you cry, my dear child?" she asked, stroking back the clinging, soft brown hair from the brow.

With an effort Mildred dried her tears, and then said humbly: "It frightens me to think I might be famous; and then it hurt me to hear you say that."

"Say what?"

"That you could not paint a better picture than that. I love you."

"But it need not grieve us to be more highly gifted than those we love. If God has given you unusual powers and faculties of the mind that may amount to genius, think how much you can do for Him,—how many more you can make happy."

"That was why I painted this picture. I wanted to get some money for Thanksgiving."

"I believe I can gratify your wish. Magdelene's mother will be very glad to pay for this picture."

"Won't I take lessons from you any more?"

"Ah! I understand your tears now. You must take lessons a long time yet. Even the noblest genius is improved by culture."

"I am glad, because to be with you reconciles me to the other things I have here."

"Never mind the other things. If you persevere, you can make your own terms of friendship by-and-by with the best of them."

"I shall not want to choose my friends here, no matter what happens," she said, with a gesture that betrayed a good deal of heartsickness.

"When one has fortune's wheel under them, they have no trouble to choose friends. But to return from that rosy future and to the likeness, as you call it,—I will take it to Mrs. Grant this evening, and set my own price."

"Last year, when Douglass Everett was here and made the girls kind to me, I painted some of them, and Beth Lee's father gave me a dollar for hers. Do you think that was too high a price for me to take? I let the others give what they liked. Connie De Smythe only gave me ten cents for hers. She said that was more than the paper and paints cost, but she would not be very particular about a few cents."

"Your conscience need not be troubled about the pay you received. I shall take more than a dollar for this, or else bring it back to you."

"But it cost me less than ten cents," Mildred said, anxiously. She would much prefer the dollar to having the picture back on her hands.

"I will make it all right, and you shall have more than the dollar."

All that day, in intervals of leisure, Mildred was adding up small sums in arithmetic that could not be satisfactorily balanced with a less

sum than two dollars. With that she could make a fairly good Thanksgiving for the limited number she had decided upon.

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CHAPTER XXV.

PROFFERED FRIENDSHIP.

THE keen mother-love quickly detected the brightened expression on Mildred's face that evening, and hoped her school-life had suddenly become more cheerful. With a good deal of self-restraint Mildred forbore to mention what had taken place until she could lay the proofs of her genius before her mother's eyes. Her dreams were troubled that night. Part of the time she was busily engaged on the portraits of dusky faces, — her missionary charges, — and again her whole life was absorbed in the labor of becoming famous. She awoke with the uncertain and tantalizing feeling of one who has a duality of careers. As she walked along the street on her

way to school, she was startled for the moment when Magdalene Grant stepped to her side and bade her a very cordial good-morning. Mildred responded with the coldness that a surprise often causes; but Magdalene, who had stood up for her long ago, was not to be repulsed; for she had made up her mind to take charge of the girl as Douglass Everett had done.

"How did you come to paint that lovely picture of me?" she asked abruptly. Mildred flushed uneasily, and was so tardy in answering that Magdalene asked another question. "Was it because you like me better than any of the others? But, really, you can't care much for any of us."

"No, I do not," Mildred responded with charming frankness, "and none of you care for me."

Magdalene winced and looked annoyed; but after a pause she said: "I am going to be friendly with you after this. I had no idea you were such a genius as Miss Leslie says you are."

"I do not know that I care to have your friendship if that is your only reason for giving it to me. If I were as slow to learn as Connie De Smythe, I should like to have folks friendly with me just as much as I do now. Maybe stupid people feel worse about such things than those who have good

thoughts of their own." Mildred spoke with such calm dignity that Magdalene suddenly realized how cruel they had all been, as well as blindly stupid, to treat one superior to them all in such a way.

"I believe we have acted like a crowd of young savages. I never really thought of it before."

"Not so badly as that. Savages would have eaten me long ago; but people do not eat each other here, since it is contrary to law, and I suppose they do not have a relish for such food," Mildred continued in her odd, reflective way, as if, after all, her schoolmates were not much improvement on cannibals.

"Well, you must recollect our school is the most exclusive in this whole city. It is very expensive. I have heard they planned it so to keep common children from coming. I do not see how you happened to come here."

"Do you suppose God calls some of us common and others uncommon?" Mildred asked solemnly.

"I never hear anyone speak about Him out of church, and where we attend is very high-toned. The minister speaks mostly about art and poetry and philosophy, you know."

"I did not know anything about it; but art and philosophy are very low compared to God; for He thought them all first. Besides, He reckons purity and holiness higher than any other created thing."

"Why, I believe you could preach. You must be smart at everything."

"I am getting tired of hearing about smartness. Let us talk of something else. Are you going to keep my picture?"

"Keep it! I should say we are going to. Mother gave Miss Leslie what she asked for it, — five dollars; but she said afterwards it was worth three times that much." Magdalene paused abruptly. She recollected too late that her confession was ill-timed.

Mildred stood quite still, swinging her satchel nervously, her face working with strong emotion.

"Do you think five dollars not enough?" Magdalene asked uneasily.

"No. I only expected to get a dollar. I believe I shall have two Thanksgiving days, — to-day and the real one."

"Are you so very fond of money?"

"Yes, when I earn it myself. I can help others then."

Magdalene was silent; but she began better to understand why the Everetts were so fond of Mildred.

"I wish you would be friendly with me. It is true I have neglected you; but I am older, and the larger girls as a rule pay scant attention to those who are two or three years younger than themselves."

"If you wish, we can be friends," Mildred said rather indifferently, and then added after a pause, "I think very few people have enough of the material that friendship is made out of in their composition to make them genuine friends all their life through. At least our schoolmates cannot have it, for I hear them quarreling after they have been such fast friends for a while. I do not care to make any bargains for such friendships."

"Well, I expected you would be delighted at my offer; but you make me feel that it is you who confer the favor, not I."

"I have found out that even if one is lonely sometimes, one has less worry and heartache than when there is a crowd to please. Books and my own thoughts make me better content than people as a rule. But you asked me to be your friend;

you must have wanted me, or you would not have made the request."

"I had no idea any young girl could be so independent. I wish I had been treated like you,—maybe I would have been very clever then."

"It is like medicine,—hard to take; but if you can be patient, afterwards you feel stronger."

When they reached the school-yard gate, Magdalene paused and said very kindly: "My mother wishes you to come home with me some evening soon; she is anxious to know you."

Mildred murmured her thanks but did not make any promise. She was getting confused at such a down-pour of friendship.

They entered the school-room together; Magdalene still chatting in a very cordial way with Mildred,—a circumstance that was a matter of surprise to their schoolfellows.

At recess Miss Leslie brought Mildred the money,—a sum so large that the poor girl had little peace of mind for the remainder of the day, for fear it might slip away from her in some unguarded moment. The skies seemed higher and bluer, the dusty, faded green of the leaves on the trees in the Park and gardens as beautiful as when

the soft June sunshine glistened on them first; while she could not find it easy to pity even the raggedest creature on the street, since they had a share in a world where there is so much to encourage and make glad. She opened the kitchen door on reaching home and walked all the way through the house to the little parlour that was so rarely used. It was the one room that never looked really homelike. Her mother was in there with some visitor, she concluded, of more than ordinary excellence, since Mr. Felton, as well as their own beloved pastor, Doctor Stornaway, was always ushered into the living-room, where the mother's work was convenient.

She paused at the door, which stood slightly ajar, and listened to the voices. Her heart gave a mad surge, for Mrs. Everett was speaking her own name. Surely, she thought, here was too much joy to be crowded into one brief day. But then it would be green in memory, perhaps, for a good many ages, she reflected, while she stood quite still a moment to let the waves of gladness enfold her silently. In a curious, introspective fashion she held a little internal consultation with thought and fancy, as to the meas-

ure of her happiness, and then with a radiant face, but otherwise quite calm, she walked into the room, and going directly to Mrs. Everett, her whole soul shining in her eyes, with an impulse too strong to be easily controlled she put her arms around her friend and kissed her on the cheek—a caress that the fair lady returned on the willing lips of her girl-friend.

“I could not help it, mamma,” she said, at sight of the surprised look in her mother’s face. “Mrs. Everett would forgive me if she knew how glad I was to see her.”

“You funny child, you must always kiss me. I have not received such a welcoming look for a good many years,—never since—” She stopped abruptly, while the tears sprang suddenly to her eyes.

Afterwards, talking over the visit with her mother, Mildred said: “It was her husband she meant, don’t you think?”

With tears in her own eyes the mother replied: “It was her husband.”

Mildred remained standing beside Mrs. Everett, her hand laid carelessly on a fold of her dress while she answered her questions.

“Are you getting on well at school? and Doug-

lass bade me ask you if your schoolmates are friendly?"

"I miss him very much," she said evasively, a hot flush sweeping over her neck and brow.

"Ah, I understand. Well, never mind, you will have fewer interruptions with your lessons; and now that I am at home again and so lonely without my boy, you must come very often to cheer me, and keep from getting overworked yourself. Your mamma has consented to let me have you over Sunday. When those girls see you with me in church, they may change their tactics."

"I do not mind them so much as I used to; but am I really to go to Grassmere again? I bade it a last good-bye when I was there."

"Why did you do that?"

"I thought when your son had left school you would not trouble yourself with me any more. I could not expect it, for you had been so kind."

"Even so, was that any reason my kindness should cease? I am afraid you have a low estimation of my friendship. I hope to hold you as my friend while I live."

Mildred did not think it necessary to make assurance of her undying regard; it seemed a waste

of words to tell Mrs. Everett she should always love her,—the fact was self-evident.

"Then it is settled, you are to come on Friday evening and remain until Monday morning. Are you willing to give yourself to me for that length of time?"

"If mamma is willing, I will go with all my heart."

"She assured me that she is willing; and now that my errand has been so satisfactorily fulfilled, I will go, for I see the carriage has returned."

Mildred accompanied her to the street and then watched the carriage out of sight. She entered the house with a face unusually happy,—for its expression of late had been a trifle melancholy,—and going to the kitchen, where preparations for tea were commencing, she took out her five dollars and told the pleasant news. "It is almost too much for one day, isn't it mamma?" she remarked sedately, when they had quieted down from the first thrill of surprise and joy. "But then it is mostly the way. If we have troubles, they come in heaps and nearly crush us; and then when the good things begin to come, they pour down on us so thick we nearly lose our breath."

"I believe events do occur in some such way, but I do not think I have thought of it before."

"I did not expect to see Mrs. Everett again. It is so long since she took any notice of us, I had been making up my mind that our happiness had all come to an end."

"Mrs. Everett explained why she had not been here. She was at Saratoga with Douglass before he went to college, and since then she has been traveling with friends. She seems to have had a charming autumn. The world has strange extremes. I kept thinking of my mission-class and their overworked mothers, while she talked."

"Don't you think God will give poor people a better chance to improve their condition in the next world? If we could see each other's souls I am almost sure some would be all cramped and scarred with the trials and crosses they have had. Sometimes, in school with the others, I like to think we shall have our chance there, and what we may be like a thousand years hence." She stopped abruptly, remembering she had said too much; for she did not wish her mother's heart pained with the knowledge of her lonely life.

"Why have you never told me how your school-mates have boycotted you?"

"What is boycotted, mamma? I have seen the word, but do not really know what the meaning is. I looked in the dictionary, but it was not there."

"That is answering my question by asking another."

"It would do no good to tell you, and only make you sorry. Besides, I think it may have been the best for me. Their mothers did not have them well trained at home. I expect they were so taken up with parties and society, they hadn't time; anyway, they are only about half-finished in the way of being friends. I don't think the best of them hold longer than a month. It would not be worth my while to get to like some of them very much for so short a time. Do you think it would?"

"A month is quite a period in a young girl's life. I would be very glad for you to have the privilege of a girl friend for even that short period."

"Well, I promised Magdalene Grant to-day, but I am not very anxious for her to hold to the bar-

gain; for it is not really me she wants to be friends with, but the Mildred Kent that may be a genius. I am almost sorry I can see so far into people's motives."

She spoke sorrowfully, as if average human beings were a moral failure. The conversation soon drifted into happier channels; for there were the plans to be made for Thanksgiving Day. She decided on the gifts to be purchased and the guests to be invited. This five dollars she called second-fruits. Such were certainly not mentioned in the Mosaic ritual; but Mildred's ideas were original about things generally, so that she was able to rob her daily life of its common-place aspect by the way she classified its various meanings. A very generous dinner was provided, Mildred purchasing the turkey herself, as well as all the other requisites for the banquet. Her mother, with a wisdom that foreshadowed future years, permitted her to do this, hoping to have her daughter grow to be a practical woman, capable of fulfilling discreetly all the obligations of womanhood. Jack Carver and Tommy Tuffts, with two others of the most forsaken ones in the school, were there, while Mildred had insisted on providing each of them with a gift from

her own money. When all was provided there was not a cent left for herself; but she drew comfort from the hope that other portraits might find purchasers. Tommy Tuffts squinted at the various appointments with such hearty approval and enjoyed the dinner with such evident satisfaction, one could not look at him without a corresponding feeling of comfort, such as steals over the least benevolent at sight of animal enjoyment among the lower orders of creation. And then he listened with such a pathetic look in the poor, defective eyes, while Mildred played some of her favorite airs. An occasional sigh, part of content at his congenial surroundings, and part of regret that it must so soon be exchanged for his smoky, ill-conditioned abode, escaped him; but with the glad hopefulness of youth he pictured for himself just such a dwelling-place with another such piece of womanhood as Mildred promised to become, installed as its mistress. Jack Carver, as he sat in his favorite arm-chair and watched the firelight dance along the dusky pictures and gleam on the bright frames, and listened to the music, meanwhile thinking over the delicious repast he had just swallowed, concluded, taking it all in all, that this was about

the very best day of his life — not even that long to be remembered visit to Grassmere quite equalling it in solid comfort. Mildred wondered at the rare generosity of Mrs. Everett sharing the beauties of her home with the humble members of her mission-school, but was not conscious that she was herself worthy of equal praise, when, with her slim earnings, she gave such content to others who helped to swell the Thanksgiving joy that welled up that day from a million hearts. Where there exists the desire to make others happy, God seldom withholds the means.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GRADUATING HONORS.

THOSE five years, very important at that formative period in Mildred's life, wore away, leaving her no longer the child-hearted girl we found her when we met her first on the play-ground of the Park Avenue School. They had been very busy years. Like a careful husbandman, who utilizes every hour of the precious seed-time, she had endeavored to make the best of her opportunities, and with such success that she was able to graduate with highest honors. She had taken in addition a course in drawing and painting. Miss Leslie had long since given place to a more competent teacher, but she still took a deep interest in the girl-artist, whom

she regarded as the one genius among the many to whom she had endeavored to open the temple of art. Mildred had grown to a beautiful womanhood during those years, mind and body alike developing nobly. Her childlike delicacy and timidity had given place to a robustness of mind and body that argued well for the purity and wisdom of her training; hence she possessed the most perfect human combination — a well-developed mind in a healthy body. With wide, fearless gaze she faced her future — the future of a working-woman, with not her own bread alone to win, but the brother and sister to educate. Her mother, she decided, must be relieved of that burden. Paul had grown to be a bright lad, with a very healthy appetite for food, both mental and physical. The missionary dream that Mildred used to speculate over so much in those early years had not faded; but the opportunities and possibilities of a higher civilization had for her active intellect an irresistible charm. To go away from these, burying far out of sight her hopes of one day painting a picture that might thrill other hearts as her own had been by a few she had looked at, seemed at times the greatest sacrifice of all. A daily conflict was thus

carried on in her heart, that often made her oblivious to annoyances that would have wounded or embittered a less generous and noble spirit. With a high sense of duty, as well as honor in regard to promises made to God, which she held fully as binding as if made to a fellow-creature, she was forced to walk uncertainly as to the ordering of her future years. Distinct as any past recollection was that act of self-consecration that wintry Sabbath day in the long ago, when she gave herself to the One who died for her; and with something of the self-abnegation which we see gleaming through the darkness of past ages through the few elect souls who were in the world, but not of it, she could think of no acceptable offering but what would mean utter immolation of all her ideals of culture and development. The one way for acceptable service seemed to be mission work in the remotest spaces of heathendom. While teachers and classmates regarded her as absorbed rather selfishly in her own thoughts and abstractions, she was only wearily going over and over the question as to what was really duty. But at last peace came, as it will eventually come to every sincere soul who yields the will to God. Like a

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revelation the thought came: "What God wants me to do I will accept as my work, and trust Him implicitly to show me what that work is." After this she was enabled generally to banish all perplexity; but sometimes in moments of depression, the old, recurring question repeated itself with wearying obstinacy.

It was not a matter for surprise with teachers or school-mates that, after her close application to study, Mildred should graduate with much more than average honors; but what did cause very marked astonishment was the essay she read. They certainly expected something more than common from her, since composition-writing had been one of the easiest of her school exercises, but were certainly quite unprepared for what she gave them. At the closing exercises of the school, when the class of pupils who had completed their studies and were to graduate read their essays, the audience listened with grave surprise as the tall, but exceedingly youthful girl read the sentences falling calmly from her lips. It was no common school-girl's composition, the joint product of pupil and teacher; Mildred had quite firmly insisted on doing her work unaided. As they

listened, her teacher concluded there was little chance for improvement on their part. A fresh touch of genius would be required ere they could produce anything so original and masterly as what this quiet, self-contained girl had thought out, mainly while watching the stars move noiselessly on their ceaseless journey to the west. In these lonely vigils of years, the mind, to such an unusual extent had she been thrown on her own resources for companionship, had matured with a rapidity uncommon in this age of frivolity and diffuseness. When she had finished, and with face paler than usual took her place again among the graduates who encircled the platform, a hush not usual on such occasions held the large assembly. A suspicion that such a literary effort was beyond the creative power of that slim girl, with rose-leaf cheek and innocent brow, kept some silent; amazement at the gifted, silent young creature who had come and gone with such still meekness through all these years, withheld professors and pupils for a time from the burst of applause that late, but all the more welcome, fell with such blessed consolation on the girl's frightened heart. Was it then a failure, this group-

ing of ideas that had been swelling in her brain from childhood, and was it all a mistake? she said to herself, with a cold shiver of desolation as the intense stillness continued. But once it was broken, how the flowers came raining at her feet—rare hot-house blossoms intended for other hands than hers. Connie De Smythe, who sat nearest her, gave her a vigorous nudge, saying with a good deal of discontent: "You have every flower in the room, I believe, except the bunch that old gentleman over there is holding; but most likely he is deaf."

Mildred raised her drooping eyelids and saw not only the clusters of lovely blossoms, but a thousand admiring eyes directed to herself, among them her own mother's, which gave her most comfort of all. The burst of enthusiasm having expended itself, the exercises went calmly on until the close,—too calmly, indeed, for those who had to take part. After the exercises were ended and the audience had in part dispersed, and the remainder gathered into friendly groups, Mildred stood apart from the rest and alone. Other schoolmates had their hosts of friends to greet and congratulate them on their handsome costumes, if nothing

else; but she lived so far remote from the great world's ongoings, very few there knew of her existence until that day. She stood watching the gaily-dressed crowd, her eyes wandering from one merry group to another, unconscious of the fact that she was the center of attraction to a much greater extent than any person present, when, from the farther corner of the hall, where the principal and several notabilities had been standing, she saw Mrs. Everett suddenly emerge from the group, — the first she had known of her presence in the room, or indeed, on the continent, since she had been absent for some time with her son in the Old World. To her delight she saw that her friend was making her way to her side.

Her greeting was characterized by the old-time grace and sweetness, and after a few words had been spoken, she said: "My dear girl, you have made us all so proud of you to-day. I believe I am as proud of you as if you belonged to me."

"I do not understand it at all," Mildred said, with a look of bewilderment. "My essay was just my own simple thoughts, — childhood's fancies, a good many of them. After it was read, for a while I was afraid it was all a mistake until the people were so kind."

"You should thank God for the gifts of such thoughts. You are richer than most of us."

"I am very glad to see you to-day. The time has seemed very long while you were away," Mildred said, turning the conversation abruptly.

"Yes, we are both glad to get back to Grassmere. Have you noticed my son in the audience?"

"I had not seen even you until you came to me."

"You would scarcely recognize him now, he has changed so these last few years. Mildred swept a keen glance over the various groups for a few seconds, and then with brightening face said:—

"That is he, standing beside a beautiful girl in pale blue satin. What a lovely creature she is!" Mrs. Everett smiled at the look of genuine admiration in the girl's face, as her eyes rested rather on her son's companion than himself.

"You do not have any praise for my boy. Is he not handsome, too?"

Mildred looked at him intently. Then she said, with a sigh of deep satisfaction. "Yes, they are the most perfect pair I have ever seen. Human beings must sometimes come pretty near perfect."

"Do you still think as much of angels and their abode as you used to?"

"I should think more about them. I am four years older since I saw you last; that is a long strip of the journey of life."

"Do you share the common regret of the young at seeing your youth slip away?"

"I did not know it was a usual thing. No, I rather enjoy the thought of approaching another life. Not but I think our existence here is a grand gift, but it has its uncertainties and limitations, which will be unknown there." Another sigh was softly breathed, but not one of satisfaction. Mrs. Everett, with a keenness of perception that surprised Mildred, said: "You have not then discovered what is to be your work in this world?"

"I am afraid God will not accept a divided heart, nor the imperfect work such a heart can offer," she said, with an expression of sadness.

"He knows the temptations of youth, its allurements, and He pities as well as comprehends. But we will talk of this some other time; you must let me take you to Douglass. He has often wondered if you would continue as pure and unworldly as ever."

"Is it the Lady Alicia whom I saw once at Grassmere, who is with him?" she asked, somewhat nervously, as they drew nearer.

"You have a fine memory for faces, I see."

Mildred hesitated, and then said with a touch of constraint: "Will she be pleased to have me presented to her? I remember she and her sister wondered if common people were made out of the same kind of clay as themselves. You know I am very, very common." A hot flush swept over the pure high-bred face that was itself a denial of her assertion.

"That is very unexpected news to me; we had the impression you were made of very uncommon clay. It seems to me that was the general belief here to-day. However, I assure you Lady Alicia will make any friend of ours welcome."

Mildred walked along rather reluctantly, with a keener realization than ever that her plain muslin frock made her conspicuous amid all that richly-dressed throng, especially when her nearer approach revealed more clearly the Lady Alicia's elegance of attire and manner. Douglass turned to her with his old, boyish cordiality, his face lighting with a sudden glow which surprised her, since their separation had been so long and so complete, none of those promised epistles having been forthcoming.

"I recognized you at once," he said, "even before you charmed us with voice and thoughts." They had been chatting together then for some time, and in the crowd they had become separated from the rest of his party. She looked up at him, for he was still a good head above her, with something of her old hero-worship in face and eyes. "I am very glad you have not grown altogether away from me. I made up my mind long ago that such a pleasure as your friendship and the visits to Grassmere were not to be again repeated in my life." She spoke with the same sweet humility that used to thrill his boyish heart, and make him long to be the knight without fear and without reproach that her presence and words used to picture.

"I think if there has been marked growth anywhere it has been with you, Mildred. I did not hear a theme at Oxford this year that, taken all in all, I would reckon equal to yours. Really, you must have breakfasted and supped with Shakespeare and Carlyle, and dined now and then with some of the great German thinkers, to have got into the company of such elevated thoughts."

"Since you went away I have been dependent

on books mainly for company, save my mother's; but I had a beautiful world with them, quite apart from any my eyes beheld."

"Ah, I understand; those girls there fell back into their old ways."

"It may have been my own fault; I was too easily discouraged in making friendly advances; but possibly it helped rather than hindered me. Don't you think one's mind gets clearer in solitude? Companions, unless they are superior, are a hindrance to one's development."

"The danger is that the mind may develop too rapidly and rob the body. Human companionship helps to keep both mind and body in a healthy state."

"If one could choose one's company; but in Mulberry Street,"—she paused, and her smile was very brave, yet sweet, as she looked up into his face.

"You are a genuine spirit-maiden, Mildred. In the middle ages they would have made a saint of you, and painted your face in their churches to worship."

"You have always reckoned me a great deal better than I am," she said, with a pained expression, while a flush not of pleasure swept over her face.

"Those of your sex do not tell me that usually. Their right to be admired and worshipped, is mutely insisted on; but it is not that sort of worship you would have received in mediæval times."

"I wonder which age will be called the nobler by the people of the thirtieth century, — ours or the one you speak of?"

"Your forecast reaches a long way ahead, Mildred. What will we be doing when that time comes?"

"If that question could be truly answered we would be more impatient than ever to begin that unknown life."

"We have drifted into a strange topic for this gay scene. The present is very tangible and very enjoyable."

"I certainly find it so," she said, with such a contented exhalation one could not call it a sigh.

Douglas looked at her intently, while her own gaze was fixed wistfully on Lady Alicia, who held court some little distance away, standing with a very queenly mien amid a group of admiring youths. His eyes followed hers, and another expression came into his face. The one appealed to the highest and but rarely touched elements of his manhood; the

other to his more worldly and material instincts. Which would fulfil his ideal of perfect and most desired womanhood when his intellect would be more matured, only time could tell. Presently they joined the others, and their odd conversation was not again resumed that day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE GREENWOOD.

MILDRED'S indecision regarding her future work became more and more perplexing. She went home from the day's triumph in anything but an uplifted mood. The path of life seemed to have come to an abrupt termination. She was still too young to expect a position in the city as teacher, and any further instruction in painting was equally unattainable, since the teachers she would require would be too expensive with their slender means, and the other children had to be provided with books and suitable equipment for the public schools. Neither could she expect any mission-board to accept for their home or foreign fields a girl so young and

inexperienced. No wonder some thoughts came unbidden that made her sad as she stood watching the stars when all in the house, save herself, were asleep. The two whom she had watched that afternoon as they walked side by side,—the most perfect-looking pair it had ever been her lot to gaze upon,—came back vividly to mind. How far removed their lives were from hers, crowned with the richest gifts of this world, no painful uncertainties clouding their early morning, the highest culture within reach, all congenial things within their grasp! The face upturned to the midnight stars was full of a longing they could not satisfy; for to-night her heart was no longer the child's heart that had, through the years, held communion with them and been comforted. She had suddenly drifted into deeper, more troubled waters, whose groundswell brought echoes from far-off continents never dreamed of before. But if pain, that pain which the soul alone can experience and which therefore is the nearest the infinite, is a handmaiden to lift us to better things, to pity her would be waste of sympathy. Rather should we call that an evangel which forces us in the solitude of

the soul to seek fellowship beyond the best of human kind. No matter how desolate the lot, it is still an enviable one where the soul is in harmony with the Divine. At last, turning resolutely from the window, she prepared for those hours of unconsciousness, which bring rest and strength to the wearied body. With the morning light came fresh resolution to continue the mental work that had so fully occupied the last few years. She compared herself to an unskilled workman with a few tools and some slight knowledge of his craft, but its real mysteries still unconquered. Education had given a partial glimpse of the laws that regulate our world and its occupants; but, as yet, that glimpse was so faint, it bewildered rather than satisfied her, intensifying the desire to penetrate more of these secrets of nature. So while her needle was flying swiftly in and out of the shimmering fabrics which her mother was teaching her how to fashion artistically, her brain was equally busy. With an open book at hand she was able, at leisure, to assimilate its contents and perhaps got more of its spirit than if, with idle hands, she had sat down to peruse its contents.

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While no other work presented itself, her mother concluded to teach her to be a skilled needle-woman. "Any work," she said to her a day or two after school was ended, "is better than idleness; and to know how to make one's own garments skillfully is one kind of education."

"You may find dress-making very useful among your cannibals. One of the first things missionaries' wives do is to set them to fixing up some clothes," Paul said lightly. He was more averse than ever to having Mildred waste her life in such uncivilized parts of the earth.

"Is Mildred going to be a missionary's wife?" Grace asked surprised.

"Why, of course," Paul responded. "Young ladies who go out as missionaries don't have to wait any time for husbands. If I was an old maid, that is where I would go." Paul was twelve years old now, and felt more of a man than most old gentlemen do at eighty, while he assumed a knowledge of things in general quite out of proportion to his years or size. He was as proud of Mildred as ever, and his keen, boyish eyes had noted her rare type of beauty,

while he was equally proud of her intellectual endowments. He and Jack Carver occupied together a back seat Commencement Day, when she had her ovation. "I tell you, any fellow would be proud of her for a sister," he whispered, with flushed cheeks, as he watched the flowers falling about her chair. Since then he had bestowed a little more consideration on her, having unwillingly admitted to himself that she was nearly equal to the average boy,—a compliment of the finest quality a lad between ten and eighteen years can give to a girl. After that age, for some years, they go to the other extreme in striking their averages between the sexes.

During these years the mission-school at St. Malachi's had continued to flourish, while Mrs. Kent still kept charge. Other classes had been formed, and teachers appointed, to keep pace with its growth; and the benefit thus coming to the church through Mrs. Kent had been far greater than all its other combined forces. Betsey Jones sat in the choir now, at St. Malachi's, and when her family at home proved refractory on a domestic subject, she easily reduced them

to submission by threatening to join Mr. Felton's church. The youthful Carvers, patterned very much after their sister Adelphine, had dropped into the school; Jack still came and was as attentive to the lessons as when, years ago, the Bible began to supersede in his affections the *Police News* and similar literary productions. He was now earning his own living respectably, and lodging with an old couple only a short distance from Mrs. Kent's. He frequented night-schools, Christian Associations, literary societies and kindred institutions, and was becoming quite a light in his own circle. Indeed, he had confided to Mildred and her mother his intention of becoming a public speaker, and getting his bread by the use of his tongue.

"It seems the most unlikely of one's members to make one famous; but if it is limber there is no surer way," he remarked one evening shortly after Mildred's triumph.

"But it needs the brain behind it to do the work," Mildred suggested timidly. She never liked to discourage Jack, and consequently his air-castles never appeared so gorgeous as when erected in her society.

"Oh, yes, some brains, certainly; but not nearly so much as for a good many other things. I have been following around after the popular speakers for a good while, and I have come to the conclusion that only about one in six makes a hit with their brains. It is other qualities which attract the people; I am not always quite sure what it is, but for one thing, they *must* have an easy way about them, as if they owned the ship and walked the quarter-deck too, and the rest of us were all common sailors. I notice those are the ones folks praise the most."

"I believe we do like to be governed and have some one to look up to," Mildred replied, while Jack continued his descriptions.

"You must have unlimited faith in yourself, and a good voice, and know which words to emphasize; then if you are able to make the audience laugh and cry, and once in a while give them a thrill, your success is certain."

Mrs. Kent had been an appreciative listener to Jack's eloquence.

"I think, even according to your own idea, it requires a good deal of ability to make a public speaker."

"I have decided it takes a good deal of that article now-a-days to make one a success at anything; but it won't hurt to try, and you will be as well off at the end as those who don't attempt anything," he said resolutely.

"I would be the one in six that uses the brains if I were you," Mildred recommended.

"You may be sure I will use all I have,—one can't do any more, but I am trying for the other things, too."

"Do you ever lecture?" Paul asked eagerly.

"Well, not exactly lecture, except in my own room or some place where no one is around; but I speak at every opportunity I have in the Association and our literary societies. I am going to the country in August, where there are plenty of trees,—I think that would be a superior place to practice."

"Will you live among them all the time?" Paul inquired.

"Yes, it is the most economical way. I shall take a tent and board myself—make a fire out of doors to do my own cooking, and catch my own fish."

Paul's soul was looking most eloquently through

his eyes. "Won't you be lonesome, old fellow, there alone?"

"Of a rainy night, or when the fish don't bite, perhaps; but one can't have country privileges and city company too. Only the wealthy individuals, who rusticate at Long Branch and Saratoga, are able to do that."

"I'd much rather go with you and sleep in a tent, than with Douglass Everett to those places, and be with a crowd of women and girls."

"Would you like to come with me?"

"I just would, if all are agreed. Would it cost much?"

"I could meet all the liabilities, and not risk bankruptcy, if your mother will give her consent."

They both turned anxiously to Mrs. Kent—Paul with a mutinous little frown already gathering on his brow.

"I am very grateful to Jack for his generous offer. Do you think I could safely trust you in the woods and by the water?"

"Trust me! I should think so!" answered Paul.

"I will endanger my own life to save him if he should be exposed to danger," Jack said loftily. Already he practiced high-sounding words in common conversation, to accustom himself to their use.

"That would be risking both of my boys. I would rather have the promise that you will both take care no such sacrifice would be required."

Jack's eyes glistened, while he was ready to make any promise to the woman who had just called him her boy.

"How long will you let Paul stay with me?"

"How long a time will you want him?"

"I have been planning if you would let him go, that we might stay two or three weeks; that is, if he did not get homesick."

"Homesick!" said Paul contemptuously, while Mildred asked curiously, "Were you thinking of taking Paul with you before this evening?"

"Why, yes, I have been thinking of it for a summer or two, but have not been in a position financially to put my desires into execution."

"It's a capital thing, having friends with plenty of money. I believe we are more fortunate than most folks in that respect."

"Money is not everything, Paul. Your mother has helped some of us more than if she had laid out hundreds of dollars on us," Jack said impulsively.

"That is like history repeating itself. St. Peter

said to the paralytic, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee.' God's people ever since have been doing, to some extent, as St. Peter did."

"Don't let us talk Bible any more," Paul pleaded. "I want to talk about camping out and catching trout. Do you wade in after them?" he asked nervously.

"Why, Paul, don't you know more than that about men's sports?" Mildred asked, quite ashamed of Paul's ignorance.

"How could I know, shut up all my life with a lot of women-folk?" he said hotly.

"You have a long pole, with a line at the end, and a few feathers made up like a fly, or else an angle-worm fastened to a hook; you throw that into the water, and the fish come and nibble at it," Jack explained.

"What is the hook for?" Grace asked.

"The trout get it fastened in their mouths, and you whisk them out of the water."

"Does it hurt?" she asked pitifully.

"Certainly it hurts the trout; but they don't think much of that after they are whisked out of the water."

"You won't want to catch them, will you, Paul?"

"Indeed, I will; and you will want to eat them, too,—the beauties that we will bring home with us. I will take you to the market to-morrow, and show you some."

"I wouldn't care to eat anything that had been so cruelly killed."

"Why, you baby, everything has been killed—beef and chickens and turkeys."

"What a dreadful world it is! But one must eat. They don't have to kill anything to get bread and potatoes and butter, do they?" she asked with a shiver.

"Certainly not," Jack replied. "And if human beings did not consume animals, they would not exist at all; and a few months or years are better for them than never to have lived. Besides, it is less painful to be killed instantly, than to suffer the pains of dissolution for months, like human beings often do."

"I never thought how much death there was in the world; and we must all die, some time." Grace was growing very dolorous, and her mother endeavored to change the conversation to more healthy topics.

The day came at last when Jack was ready to go. The August sun was making life in the crowded city more of a burden than delight to others besides Paul, who had never seen the hours move so slowly before. The morning Jack called, and he and Paul walked together to the depot, there could hardly have been found in the whole vast city two happier individuals than these two youths. If there were, they were certainly to be envied. Paul staggered along under a basket of eatables that Mrs. Kent thought would serve them for several days, thereby considerably lessening Jack's expenses. Paul had many a time watched, with longing eyes, the cars moving away with their living freight, little knowing how many a sorrowful, anxious heart they contained; but this was his own first railway excursion, and a bunch of thistle-down was scarcely as light, just then, as his glad heart. In a very large pocket-book, which he had purchased the day before, lay the money for his ticket and other incidental expenses. With a very unnecessary flourish he took it out as he stood beside Jack at the ticket office, and waited his turn to invest. He glanced at some ragged urchins hovering near, hoping they

would get a glimpse of the repository for his cash. His desire was granted. "Say, lend us a fiver, Mr. Pocketbook," one of them said with a grin, while they all came crowding up. Paul very hastily slipped his cash-book out of sight and hastened after Jack to escape their jeers,—he found very early in his travelling experiences it was just as well not to make a parade of one's wealth.

The morning's ride had a charming freshness for both of them, but Paul grew very impatient to get to the wide, healthy breathing-spaces of the open country. It took a good while before they had passed all the houses of the city, but once they were in sight of the woods and meadows, with cattle feeding on the hill-sides or standing knee-deep in the streams, his rapture was unbounded.

"Whatever do they have cities for?" he cried impatiently, "when there is so much room in the country?"

"Most people prefer cities. They find the solitude of the country irksome, and they crave the excitement that multitudes of their fellow-beings bring."

"They can't be very sensible people to get lonesome out here. Will it be country like this where we are going?"

"Yes, even more so than this. We will have no houses in sight."

"I wish I was an Indian," Paul said after a long silence. He thought their brief fortnight would too soon end, when they must go back to the suffocating, dirty city. "When I am a man I shall go away off where land is cheap and get a thousand acres. Then I won't have folks crowding me," he said decidedly.

"I shall reside in the city. A few weeks' outing in the country will suffice in the heated term of summer. Advantages for culture and acquiring wealth are superior in the city," Jack remarked, with the superior knowledge of six additional years.

"Money is only one thing. There are a great many other things I would rather have, if I had to choose between them."

"Money will bring you everything."

"I don't believe it," Paul said stoutly, while there flashed from memory a vision of that weary-looking lord whom he had seen at Grassmere so long ago. Their arguments always ended amicably, and soon their conversation drifted into other channels.

When the news-agent came around with his stores, Paul eyed him admiringly. The goods he had, and the military-looking costume, made him seem a very important personage for his size.

"I wish I could keep store like you," he said while affecting the purchase of a fine orange. The news-agent's usually set features relaxed into a broad smile. "I never heard this called keeping store."

"Will they let any one come here and sell?"

"As you are a very decent-looking boy, perhaps they might allow you."

"There are other requirements than respectability," Jack said coldly, while he wished Paul would not be quite so effusive.

"You want to be a farmer and a news-agent both," he said, after they were alone.

"I expect there are a good many other things that, if I knew about them, I would like to do," Paul said evasively, — the world that morning was broadening out amazingly before him; he had no idea before that our world was such a seductive planet. They reached their destination a little after mid-day — a quiet, country place, with few houses, and not far from a dense forest in whose

shadows Jack was bent on erecting his tent. When Paul stood on the platform of the small station-house, and watched the train sweeping far away, a feeling of loneliness came over him; but Jack spoke so cheerily, while he pointed out the broad stream where the trout were jumping, and the sheltering woods wherein their tent was to be pitched, that he soon forgot his slight attack of homesickness. A shambling, loose-jointed fellow was hovering near, as if in search of an easy job. Jack secured his services to assist in setting up their establishment. They gathered up a part of their belongings, leaving the rest in the station-master's care, and started across a stretch of dry pasture land where a few dejected-looking cows were busily cropping the stunted grass; then they crossed the stream by a delightfully dangerous-looking bridge, which Paul admired far more than the massive structures to which he had been accustomed.

"You must make your fires down by the stream, — all the campers have to do that, or else quit the place," the man informed them.

"Then we had better not erect our tent too far within the forest's depths," Jack suggested.

"Somewhere near by your fire'd be best. It'll help frighten away the mosquitoes — they're powerful thick here."

"We are not afraid of 'squitoes," Paul affirmed courageously. Already the stillness of his surroundings was growing awesome.

"Maybe you're not; but you'll find these fellows have sharp teeth."

"'Squitoes have no teeth."

Jack thought the argument had proceeded far enough, and set the man to putting down the stakes, while Paul hovered near.

The tent was soon in position, a fire burning merrily on the beach, and a heap of spruce boughs laid in a corner of the tent for a bed. They got a box from the obliging station-master to serve for pantry, where Jack put his own and Paul's goodly supply of provisions, and then went to a neighboring farmhouse to hire the use of a frying-pan and kettle. They made arrangements also with the same convenient neighbor for their supply of eggs, butter, milk, and vegetables. Paul's spirits were on the point of effervescing when, their arrangements all completed, and their domestic machinery in good running order, he followed Jack to the stream to

get some trout for supper. They fished for some time without success. Neither of them had ever cast a line before, and it took them a good while to do it skillfully enough to entice a trout after their bait; but at last Jack drew out a speckled beauty. Paul was in raptures, a number of times feeling certain he had a bite; but the only game that came to his hook were tree-branches and roots. Jack's success was very limited, but they were able to say, in their first letter home, they had trout for supper the very evening they came.

Paul took a stroll through the woods after tea, while Jack went off by himself to practise a lesson in oratory.

As he wandered through the dense green spaces, Paul felt his spirits growing lighter. There was nothing here to terrify; none of the silence and awful solitude he had expected. Every inch of ground seemed to be inhabited with healthy living creatures busy about the impatient concerns of their every-day existence. The trees seemed to be a vast concert-hall, where birds of various kinds were twittering soft lullabys to wee nestlings, or pouring out glees and madrigals and choruses with a prodigality of vocal energy that amazed the city

boy, who listened to them for the first time in his brief existence. He wished very much that Mildred was there long enough to give expression to his feelings. He felt his own powers of expression utterly inadequate and there was something actually painful to him in having so many new thoughts that he had no language to voice. Mildred always seemed to have such a convenient faculty of saying what others felt in moments of strong emotion, that he never realized how useful she was until that hour, while for the first time it occurred to him that she was something like the poets whose words touch deeper chords in the human heart than any others of the children of Adam — no matter whether their sentences rhyme or not. He went back to the tent at last his thoughts still unuttered, and lying down on his spicy couch was crooned to sleep deliciously by the frogs who were singing in a marsh way across the river.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SET FREE.

TO Paul and Jack those days seemed to go on "dove's wings," there was so little jar and turmoil in them. Before the last day came, Paul had been many a time thrilled at sight of an excited, speckled trout dangling at the end of his line. He could climb a tree now as nimbly as any country boy, walk the fences, milk the cows, and could distinguish at least half a dozen different bird-notes, with sundry other accomplishments only to be acquired in the wideness of the country. He daily regretted that his lot had not fallen in a farmhouse with the prospect, at majority, of a farm provided and stocked, such as the farmers' sons in that vicinity received from

their thrifty parents. He actually regretted the necessity for sleep, and abbreviated it at both ends as far as he was able. At night there were harmonies not heard in the bright sunshine,—the water rippling past their tent had a different murmur; the frogs' voices rang out more clear; and now and then the note of a night-bird sounded so strange and weird, he shivered comfortably on his bed of spruce, and thought of them in their nests in the highest branches of the trees, feeling very glad he was not a robin perched away up there. With reluctance he bade good-bye to all these, and the farmer folk too, who had been unusually kind to him, going so far in their kindness, in some cases, as to invite him back the following summer to stay a week or two with each of them. He expressed his surprise to Jack on their way home in the cars, that they should be so good to him; but Jack accounted for the phenomenon by assuring him that it was because he had been so obliging and pleasant himself.

"I assure you there is nothing pays one better than to conduct one's self in that way. One never can know when his courteous acts may come back and greet him."

Paul reflected silently on Jack's remark, and then said :

"If we are good-natured with people because we expect to get paid for it some time, it won't amount to much."

"Possibly not, if one weighs those things carefully; but if we are to be successful, we must take all these things into account. It is the minute actions very often that have the greatest influence on our careers. A pleasant word and polite act may get us a vote a dozen years hence for some coveted office or emolument."

"It might do for politicians to spend their time smirking at their fellow-men, but I don't mean to be a public servant. It costs altogether too much for all the honor it brings," Paul said wearily, for Jack's ethics had a depressing effect on his spirits.

The welcome awaiting him when he reached home made Paul, for the time, forget the scenes he had left so reluctantly; besides, there was a special piece of good news to be communicated to him. Mildred had work, and so much better than she had expected that they were all elated at her success.

After he had told every incident of the past fort-

night that memory held in trust with lingering minuteness, Grace, who had listened very attentively, said with a sigh of deep satisfaction, "We have had our surprises too. We have all been out to Grassmere; and only think! Mildred is not going among the cannibals, not for a while, anyway. She is going to teach in the Park Avenue School."

Paul looked the surprise the occasion required. "Why, how did she get such an offer?"

"We are not sure ourselves; only have our suspicions. The trustees wrote a few days ago offering her the situation, and she has accepted it."

"It must be the Everetts."

"Yes, we believe it is to them we are indebted."

"Now I can go to college as soon as I am able to matriculate."

"Will you need so much education to milk the cows and raise potatoes and chickens?" Grace asked.

"I shall want a home in the city in the winter. I won't care to live on a farm, only in the summer," Paul said evasively, for the life and activity had charmed him as he came home through the crowds on the street.

"I am afraid you are getting too ambitious, my son. Not very many can afford such luxuries as that. But a college course will not prevent you making a good farmer; and I think if all goes well we can promise you that."

"It seems to me we are very lucky."

"I do not like the work lucky, my son. We should rather say, God has helped us in our efforts to help ourselves."

"Well, anyway, we have good friends on earth who help us."

"You have a good sister, Paul. If Mildred had become discouraged when she first went to school, and staid at home, she would not have had the chance to accept the fine situation offered her now; neither would she have formed the charming friendship that has brought us all so much pleasure. I hope you will follow her example when you meet with difficulties."

"She didn't get us Jack Carver and the mission-school, anyway," Paul said, with some triumph. It was not agreeable for him that Mildred should get the credit of all their pleasant happenings.

"If you recall the circumstances I think you will

find it was through her means we made Jack's acquaintance; but let us forget all that now, only to give credit where it is due. Mildred has helped us all to bear our burdens while enduring her own silently."

"I am going to bear this family's burdens pretty soon," he said valiantly.

"You can begin at once; every day gives its opportunities."

"Where is Mildred?" Paul asked, turning the conversation with much cheerfulness. He was getting tired of so much practical advice.

"She went to see the Carver children. They are very ill with scarlet fever. The air is so hot and close everywhere in the city now, especially in narrow courts and crowded tenements, I am afraid some of them will die."

"Won't she be in danger of catching it, too?"

"She had it years ago, when Grace was a baby, — I had you all sick at once with it."

"We are a very —" he paused uncertainly and then said — "providential family." He was afraid to use the word lucky again in his mother's presence. While they were talking Mildred came in, looking pale and troubled.

"Are any of them dead?" Paul asked, after Mildred, with brightening face, welcomed him home.

"Yes, two of them; and, oh, mother! there was no one to get them ready for the coffin, but their mother, with what help I could give." Mildred shuddered as she thought of the painful scene.

"Why don't the neighbors help her, or else the undertaker?"

"The neighbors are afraid, and I think they could not afford to hire the undertaker for everything. Jack came as soon as he heard about it. I was so glad to see him coming. I was afraid I should feel it my duty to stay longer; it would be cruel to leave them all alone with their dead. Oh, I wish there was not so much misery in the world, or that I could forget about people's sorrow and need of help like other girls do," Mildred sobbed.

"Is it Christ-like to crave forgetfulness of the burdens our fellow-creatures totter under? He gave His life to us. Should we not think it high honor to be permitted to follow in his steps?"

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dust and unrest of the huge city to the sky flecked
with light summer clouds. How pure and serene
it seemed in contrast.

"I am glad those two little creatures are free
from their suffering. What a change for them, from
the burning fever and stifling room to the green
fields of Paradise! I am so glad God takes such
numbers of little ones from the city's slums."

"It seems to me, Mildred, that you thank the
Lord for nearly everything," Paul said, as if just
awakening to the fact that she generally found
some rare bit of blue in all sorts of skies. At
least she realized that behind all clouds and storms
the skies were still shining and she drew her
light from depths infinitely removed from the
mists and vapors that cloud too often the view of
average folks. It is a grand experience to dwell
always in those still places; but only those attain
them whose thoughts are wide and high enough to
grasp eternal things.

Mrs. Kent replied to Paul's remark: "If we
keep close to God we shall be able always to
thank Him for what He gives us. St. Paul had
that experience. I ask for nothing higher for my
children."

"I wonder why it is so difficult for people to trust their interests in God's hands: there are so few that really do it," Mildred said; and then, after a moment's reflection, added, "We may for a while, in some uplifted moments; but afterwards we are troubled and perplexed. I wonder God is so patient with us."

"I believe that is a mystery to all men; but for His patience, the Adamic type would have been destroyed long ago, and some better one dwelling in our places to-day. But our conversation is getting too visionary. It is useless speculating on subjects so far out of range of our experience or possibility to understand," her mother replied.

"I think Mildred is a good deal given that way; but still I missed her sometimes when I heard voices and saw things I couldn't explain the meaning of out in the country," Paul said.

"You wanted me there to label your emotions," Mildred said humorously; then getting her drawing materials, she sat down to sketch from memory the two little forms so soon so be shut out from the sunshine.

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after they are buried from her sight," she said to
her mother. Paul and Grace watched with consid-
erable solemnity as the two little faces and rigid
forms came out with vivid reality on the paper.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PLEASANT PICTURES.

MILDRED'S duties as teacher were to begin the following week, and it would be no longer safe for her to visit the fever-stricken rooms where the Carver's lived. She took her sketch of the two little ones to Mrs. Carver, whose surprise at the excellence of the likeness was only equaled by her gratification at having something tangible to recall their memory. The hard lines of her face grew soft as she wiped the tears away, while gazing at her lost darlings pictured before her. Mildred bade her good-bye, explaining why she could not come again. Mrs. Carver bewailed the loss of her one friend in need,—her face assuming its natural expression while she expatiated

on the ingratitude of some of her neighbors, more especially the Joneses, whom she had succored in seasons of affliction.

"It's all that Betay's fault. She's gettin' so stuck up she'll try to make out the old man is somethin' more'n a cobbler; but bless you! he couldn't make a pair of boots to save his neck."

"Is mending shoes not as respectable as making them or wearing them? It all amounts to the same thing; labor of any kind is honorable."

"Ah, miss, few folks look on things like you do. It would be a more comfortabler world if they did. My old man says you've made him realize religion better'n all the preachers in the city. I shouldn't wonder if he'd perfess and jine your church. He says he's bound to go where you do when he quits this world."

"When death comes it softens our hearts, but we soon forget the lessons it brings." Mrs. Carver did not reply; it was painful for her to linger long in a tender mood, gentleness and thoughts of death and the soul were alien to her nature; but she was a great worker, and so was not utterly destitute of worth of character.

As Mildred left she wondered if it were possible

for Mrs. Carver's nature to be elevated by the religion of which she talked so flippantly. She met Jack a few steps from the door. "Have you been there?" His face lighted up at sight of her.

"Yes."

"It is extremely good of you. I should not go there if it wasn't for my father."

"I wonder if she is not as God made her?"

"Certainly not. It is true God made snakes and lizards as a species of scavengers in creation, but their counterparts among human beings are only to blame, or their parents before them, for being as they are."

"Pray, what evolutionist has taught you that?"

"None in particular; but I have been studying the matter up, and am learning how to account for a good many of nature's queer productions."

"I imagine your new philosophy shifts a good deal of the blame for our own defects to our own shoulders."

"Yes, I should be a fatalist if I did not think we were in fault ourselves for our wrong-doing, or that our environment and parents had a share of the blame."

"Then I hope you will show us what possibili-

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ties are within reach of a resolute soul bent on its
own uplifting."

"I will do my best."

Mildred said good-bye, and Jack went into the
house to find that his stepmother had been watch-
ing them from the window.

"Well, do you think that girl 'll ever marry the
likes of you?"

He gave her a look that would have warned a
wiser woman, but she only laughed scornfully.

"I did not come here to discuss that question
with you, nor to ask your advice."

"Well, I can tell you, whether you want my
advice or not, she'll never have anything to say to
you."

"I could not blame her, seeing what connections
I have," he said, with a sternness that warned her
to say no more. "Tell father to come to my
rooms as soon as he gets home."

"You can deliver your own messages. I've been
your servant long enough," she muttered, too angry
to try and make the peace she had so ruthlessly
broken, although she well knew it was worse than
folly to quarrel with him now that he was in a
position to be a good deal of help to them. Jack

left, shutting the door with unnecessary vigor behind him, the light all gone from his face that the interchange of ideas with Mildred had brought, and he walked along moodily, wondering if it was any use for him, with such relations, to try to be anything. He quickened his pace, thinking to overtake Mildred and tell his troubles. She always soothed his heart-aches; but after a brisk walk he saw, some distance off, a carriage stop, when Douglass Everett sprang out and greeted Mildred. Mrs. Everett and the Lady Alicia were in the carriage. Jack lingered in a doorway watching the group, for Mildred had gone to the carriage and was standing beside Mrs. Everett, who held her hand with a cordiality that was awakening pangs of jealousy in two of Mildred's old schoolmates, who, like Jack, were watching the distinguished Grassmere party. Presently Mildred entered the carriage, and taking the vacant seat beside Douglass, was carried out of their sight with a very contented expression on her face, which Beth and Connie did not fail to observe as she drove past them.

"It is just ridiculous the way the Everetts patronize that girl," Connie said indignantly. "They won't notice people worth their hundreds of thou-

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sands, who live in elegant houses, but can't pass
 her on the street without gushing over her as if
 she were a duchess. I am so glad that Douglass
 is going to marry that Lady Alicia Merton."

"Why so?" Beth asked.

"Because he can't marry Mildred. He was look-
 ing at her just now, though, in a way I would
 not want the man I was engaged to be married to
 some day, to look at a pretty girl. If Mildred is
 poor, and her mother a dressmaker, she is every
 bit as beautiful as any of those English heir-
 esses.

"I am going to call on Mildred. She always
 made me feel better when I was with her, and
 made me wish to be good. I don't remember any-
 thing in our school days pleasanter than going to
 her place, listening to her stories and taking part
 in her make-believes. I wish, Connie, we had let
 her be friends with us. I know she liked us, and
 wanted to be friendly," Beth's voice trembled.

"That was all there was to be gained in having
 her for a friend."

"Why, no, indeed, Connie. She got us twice
 to Grassmere, and I am sure we have boasted
 about that ever since, without acknowledging how
 we came to go there."

"I expect you will drop all your old friends after you get intimate with her again," Connie said, coldly.

"Mildred is not that sort of girl; I used to like all of you better when I was with her. She used to make one feel friendly with all the world."

"She will get you more invitations to Grassmere. It will pay you to go and eat humble pie with her."

"I shall not seek her friendship for anything so mean as that; but ever since I heard her essay I have wanted to be like her. Connie, I would be willing to be poor and have to earn my own living, if I could have her mind."

"I am afraid you are getting religious; then we cannot be friends any more,—not as we have been, anyway," Connie said, anxiously.

"My religion won't interfere with our friendship, I can assure you; but really, I never thought before that it was religion that made her so different from any one we know."

"Why don't you call anyone else that we are acquainted with religious?"

"Really, Connie, I do not see any difference in any one of our friends such as being real Chris-

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tians ought to make. I believe if a whole crowd of us were dropped on a heathen shore, we could not among us all teach the people how to be fit for heaven." Beth laughed nervously. Probably she had never given the subject of religion so serious thought before. Connie was getting nervous too. She never found religious conversation comforting, even in childhood, when Mildred was in the habit of discussing such topics. However, they agreed to call in company on Mildred before many days, and try to regain their lost footing in her friendship. But Mildred, as she rode along towards Grassmere that day, had no thought of Beth and Connie. Other fancies were crowding her brain; but the underlying thought of all was, "Could it be possible that the little Carvers, recently set free from the noisy tenement and stifling court, were looking on fairer scenes than these?" Mrs. Everett, noticing her intent look, said: "A penny for your thoughts. They must be pleasant from the look on your face."

"A penny would be a poor exchange," Douglass answered for Mildred, as he watched the rose-leaf tint deepen in the sensitive face.

"Were you thinking of Grassmere? When we

knew you long ago, it seemed to occupy more of your thoughts than other things."

"It was of two little children who have just died in a crowded tenement. They hardly knew the taste of pure air—never such perfumed air as this," she said, with a long inhalation. "I have been speculating if they are finding heaven more perfect than this. If they do I am so glad they have escaped to it."

"What an odd idea!" Lady Alicia said. "I never thought of heaven as being a place—certainly not like any I ever shall see on earth."

"I always think of heaven as something like Grassmere—the flowers and pictures and music. But I can never conceive of myself as enjoying it continually, without having to look after the sick and desolate. To have no such duties would be one of the great joys of heaven," Mildred said timidly.

"Why, are you compelled to care for them now?" her ladyship asked, arching her fine eyebrows.

"We are surrounded by poor people and sick children, and we must do all we can to help them," Mildred said, as seriously as if to help others were, without question, a part of her daily task.

"You should come to England and marry a clergyman: your husband's parishioners would soon style you Lady Bountiful."

Mildred's face flushed, but she said gently: "There is no need to cross the ocean to be helpful to the poor—we have too many neglected ones here."

The carriage had reached the door, but when they alighted Mildred was in no haste to enter the house; the picture that filled eyes and heart all around was too fair to pass hastily in order to look at the picture just come across the seas which Mrs. Everett had insisted on her coming out directly to see.

"It is discouraging to look at," she said to Douglass, who lingered at her side after the others had gone in.

"Why so?"

"No artist could do it justice, at least, not in this world. After centuries of near companionship with God, Raphael might be able to do it justice; but the birds and bees and perfumes would be lacking,—and the life," she added sadly.

"I do not think anything will satisfy you, Mildred, short of the power to create, not merely copy with materials all provided."

"Oh, no; but it seems to me we can do nothing higher than to think God's thoughts — not try to materialize them with brush and paint."

"Are you losing your passion for art?"

"Not when I am shut in with brick and stone; but out here I get so discouraged, — to reproduce that scene seems like a caricature. Men must discover something besides paint and oil to imitate truly that atmosphere and those superb distances." She stretched her hand to the west, already flushing with the sunset's glow.

She had forgotten her errand, standing there with that look of rare content on her face, that Douglass remembered of old.

"Don't you think one gets glimpses now and then of other worlds than this?" she asked after a pause. "I seem to have done so to-day in thinking of those little children. I could almost fancy I saw them straying among the flowers and music of Paradise. But you did not know I had come from there," she said, seized with a sudden anxiety. "How terribly forgetful I have been! Those children died of scarlet fever." Her face was as white as one of the white lilies at her feet, when she looked up at him. "It would be a thousand

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deaths to me if I brought death to Grassmere —
to you?" she murmured.

He was looking down at her so steadily that
her fears increased. "Are you very angry with
me," she asked.

"I do not think I could be angry with you,
Mildred, not even if you brought me face to face
with death; but do not be alarmed. I have ex-
perienced all the burnings of scarlet fever, I im-
agine, since my mother thought in my babyhood
it would leave her childless."

They entered the house then, Douglass leading
the way to the drawing-room, where the picture
was hanging. Mildred stopped abruptly; for there
looking down at her was her own self, as she
had looked that first day she came to Grassmere,
while standing with timid awe at the threshold.
She stood now, looking up with parted lips, the
color deepening in her cheek.

"Do you recognize the portrait?"

"Yes, it is my child-self — but idealized, made
beautiful."

"My mother considers it a very true likeness."

"Was it your mother's son who painted it?
Allow me to compliment the artist." She turned
to him, seeing he did not answer her question.



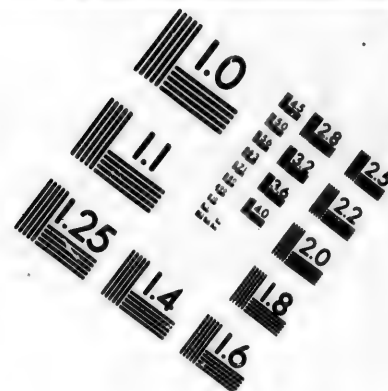
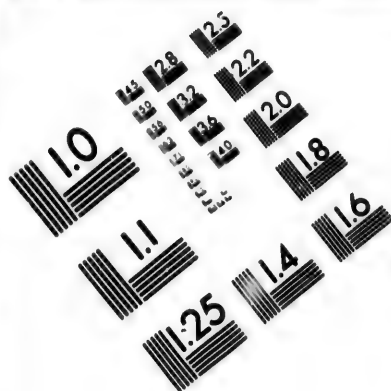
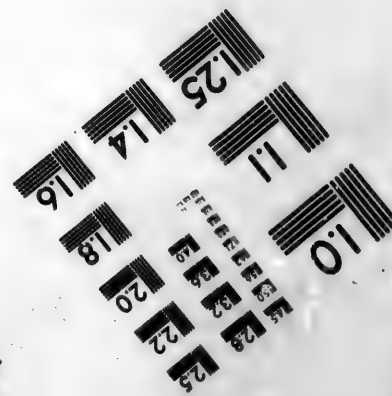
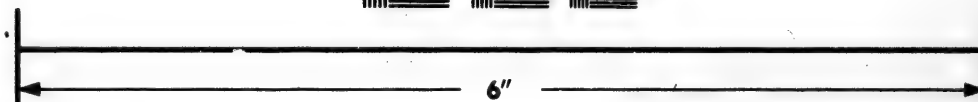
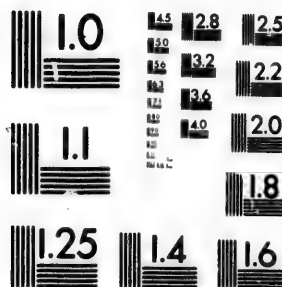


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"I can take but little credit myself. A genuine artist finished it for me."

"But did he ever see that little girl standing there?"

"Only through my eyes."

"I shall not give the foreign artist any credit then; but I should thank you for the honor you have done me. It will be pleasant to think of always being here. I can easily fancy that little girl enjoys standing here amid all this beauty."

"You have a peculiar faculty of individualizing yourself."

"It is difficult to realize myself the very same all through these years, — first child, then girl, and now woman."

"Scarcely woman yet, is it?"

"At least a wage-earner."

Mrs. Everett entered the room and came to her side. "How do you like our picture? Do you know it has been honored with a place in the Paris Salon?"

"Then my criticism will be valueless." Mildred was getting nervous, and felt dangerously like crying. It brought much the same sensation that she felt after reading her essay. Lady Alicia joined the

group. "Some faces remind me of animals or birds; but that face looks like some flower," she said, regarding the picture critically.

"That is a fine compliment, Mildred," Mrs. Everett said.

"Flowers are not so high in the scale of creation as beasts or birds; far less complex and lacking the touch of nature by which all animals are allied in a sort of brotherhood from man downwards."

"You would rather resemble some fine animal, then, than the most perfect flower?" Lady Alicia asked.

"The soul that looked at you from my face — yes. I can trace a likeness to man in your collie," she said, turning to Douglass, "a likeness to God in Ralph's master."

"I never knew a young girl who always went so deep into every subject. To think your thoughts would weary me," her ladyship said, as she strolled to the other side of the room and sat down at the piano. Douglass joined her presently, leaving Mildred and Mrs. Everett standing by the picture.

"She should have exquisite thoughts if her mind is as perfect as her body," Mildred remarked, with a wistful look as she regarded the pair by the piano.

"She is very lovely, but has not the high thoughts that my own little girl here has." Mrs. Everett touched the thoughtful brow lovingly.

"She has so many other things she does not need to think; but intellect among high and low is the stamp, though flesh and blood may differ."

"Ah, you still brood over that unfortunate remark; but Lady Alicia is not like her sister. As you know more of her you will love her as we do."

"Will she live at Grassmere after the marriage?"

"Douglass is still too young to think seriously of marriage for some years. With both of them a change of fancy may take place; but they seem strongly attached at present."

Mildred watched them intently for a while, and then said with a little sigh, — whether of content at the sight or longing to have some such joy of her own one could not decide from her expression. "I am not surprised that they love each other. I wonder if there are such beautiful creatures and pleasant happenings in the other planets and systems? There are a great many delightful things in this little planet. What scenes God overlooks every day."

"Mildred, you must be a changeling. You were originally intended for the Sun or Sirius. Your thoughts go ranging in such high altitudes."

"Oh, no, I am altogether an earth-maiden; because I think of these things is that I have been so much alone." Mildred looked pained.

"Then the solitary confinement of youth generally might develop a better race of thinkers; but I believe, to speak in earnest, that our young people are amused and assisted more than will be likely to produce a race of intellectual giants."

"It is very gratifying, no doubt, to be happily situated and have abundance of leisure, with money and friends, but one may be stronger to endure life if they have a limitation of these. I like to think that all my allotments are planned a little ahead for me by a higher than human wisdom."

"Do you not find difficulty in believing that?"

"I do not find it impossible."

Lady Alicia began to play. The music was a revelation to Mildred, and touched a chord in her heart that perhaps had never before responded to human things. "What is it?" she asked.

"A passage from Lohengrin. Have you never heard it before?"

"I have never heard any classic music, save what you have played for me."

"Then I shall enjoy your rapture when you hear Wagner and Beethoven properly rendered. You must go with us to the concert to-morrow evening. There is to be some good music there."

"I am afraid you will ruin me altogether for hard, practical life, giving me such glimpses of what will be the impossible for me. I have hitherto been content, lacking the knowledge that there were such harmonies in this world. I do not think I can be henceforth."

"Nor need you be. Such music will be quite within reach of your possibilities, with concerts and other musical entertainments frequently occurring."

"Are they not very expensive?"

"No, indeed, especially the rehearsals, which are as good as any. But you shall go with me whenever you wish."

Mildred murmured her thanks, and then sat listening as Lady Alicia played on, while she thought of the sources for enjoyment the rich and cultured possess.

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CHAPTER XXX.

VISITOR.

MILDRED started for her school the day it opened, more anxious than on that morning years before, when first she entered its doors. Paul and Grace accompanied her, — Paul with resolute face, determined to begin the college career that was to lead to an office in the city and a country residence, with cows and hens of his own.

Mildred's anxieties abated as the day wore on. Children, as a rule, are everywhere more influenced by gentleness than by the other extreme, and the Park Avenue flock in her charge were no exception. As the days wore into months, she found that the best way to gain control of her

pupils was to have her own nature in thorough control. Hence she discovered that what she had expected would be her most formidable task, was really her lightest. She found her greatest joy in awakening and developing the intellectual faculties of the members of her little class. She was too original in her modes of thought and work to follow rules framed altogether by others, so that class-room No. 6 was conducted differently from any previously in operation there. Teacher and children went out on little excursions of their own which were not set down in the text-books. Not content herself to slip along the surface of problems that confronted each onward step, she trained her scholars to ponder for themselves the reason of things. With her vivid sense of the greater importance of the other life, she tried to impress on the plastic minds of her charges the grandeur, as well as the security, of living wisely in regard to the eternal state. Her lessons were in many cases repeated in homes where religious questions were as carefully avoided as the small-pox; but her unusual cleverness in awakening the dormant faculties of childhood condoned this offence against the proprieties of school method.

Some of her pupils, she discovered, knew as little about revealed religion as so many young Patagonians. Until she could begin mission work in real earnest she resolved to take advantage of whatever opportunities came in her way.

Being now a wage-earner, she felt herself rich enough to take lessons in painting from one of the best art-teachers in the city. The class was large and select; but Mildred was so accustomed to solitary work, that she did not seek recognition from anyone, but took her place each Saturday at her easel, soon growing so absorbed that the presence of others was scarcely heeded.

The teacher was a dissatisfied-looking individual, with few words of praise in proportion to the faults he found; but he was growing interested in the shy girl who came and went almost as noiselessly as the sunshine, and whose work left him so little chance for criticism that he was sometimes angry with it for that very reason, and at times gave her more difficult tasks than any other pupil in the room of the same age or experience. Mildred accepted everything so patiently, he was growing bewildered over her and her work.

One day, while she was sketching, with many

an internal shiver, a painful anatomical subject, he came and stood at her side in silence for some time, and then asked her abruptly: "Are you going to be a teacher of painting, or do you aim at being an artist some day yourself?"

"I have not thought of being a teacher; but I have been trying to make pictures ever since I can remember."

"That is not answering my question. Do you expect some day to be an artist?"

"The world is wide and free. If God gives me the power to copy His works, can any human being question my right?" A quick flash that gave him a shock of surprise came into the eyes she turned upon him.

"I presume no one wishes to do so; but it would be better if young persons would make certain they have received that power. There are already too many smearing canvas and wasting good paint."

"I work hard five days in the week. Can any one in this world or elsewhere deny me this, my only relaxation?" This silent creature, whom he fancied could be crushed as easily as a moth, faced him with a courage no pupil had ever shown before.

"If you take such satisfaction in your work, you probably have talent enough not to waste paint and canvas. Besides, the pleasure you take in it will in any case be an offset to the loss." He spoke quite mildly now.

"Then it is not necessary we should continue the subject further," Mildred said, with a dignity that would have become Queen Victoria dismissing some troublesome courtier.

For the remainder of the lesson Mildred continued her disagreeable sketch, scarcely thinking, however, of what she was doing. For the question was perplexing her: "Was it wise to waste time and the price of her lessons, if her teacher, who must be a judge, considered her work a failure?" She lingered at her easel until all the others had left the studio, and then, going to his side where he stood retouching a portrait, she said:—

"I have been thinking the subject over, and have concluded to cease coming here. Canvas and paint are the smallest waste in the matter. My time and the cost of the lessons are of more importance. Besides, I shall think of other things in my spare moments."

He turned upon her a look of genuine regret;

for by the tone of her voice he realized that her decision was arrived at by the slow process of reason, and would not easily be shaken.

"I am very sorry I spoke to you on the subject. It is a habit I have with art-students. You have no idea how conceited they often are. But I see heroic treatment is not required in your case."

"If you were merely trying to deceive me I could not easily believe you again. If so, how can I know certainly when you are telling me the truth?"

"Bless my heart! Where in the world have you sprung from? You must have lived among saints hitherto."

"I have lived with my mother. She never deceived me."

"Well, henceforth I will use crystal truths with you. I will begin now with the statement that I believe you have sufficient talent for painting to warrant the expectation that you will be a genuine artist if you persevere—mind, you must work for it." He held out his hand,—a shapely, nervous hand, that betokened the skilled workman.

"You will forgive what I said this afternoon?"

It is the first time I ever made such a request of a pupil."

"On condition that you do so always when justice requires it of you." She gave him her hand.

"The conditions are too severe; I have your hand and I think your forgiveness also."

"I had nothing to forgive, really. No doubt I have conceit, as well as the others, which needed to be humbled."

"I think not. You will come back now and practise the same industry as hitherto?" he asked somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, I will come. I could have shed a few tears as I finished the muscles in that hand just now, thinking it was the last time I should paint them. Not that I particularly enjoy painting muscles," she hastened to explain.

"You take life entirely too seriously. Even if you had no talent for the work, when you find so much enjoyment in it, you would be very foolish to give it up."

"Not if it was a waste of time. That is the worst prodigality youth can be guilty of. At least, I feel so."

"I am glad we had our little unpleasantness. We might never have got so well acquainted."

"Perhaps not. I do not easily make friends. I have very few."

"But they are genuine ones, I am certain."

Her face brightened: "Oh, yes; they give me such a sense of opulence; as if I were a millionaire, instead of a timid girl with a very small salary."

"You are not timid, as I have found." He lingered as if content to continue the conversation indefinitely; but Mildred, as if recollecting herself, said good-bye abruptly and left. She wanted to get alone and think over the professor's comforting words, while she decided it would pay to have a good many shivers over anatomical studies if at last she could put some splendid form on canvas. To paint Miriam, in the forefront of the Israelitish host in some green place in the desert, had long been a cherished fancy. The hours spent in the studio after this were the red-letter ones of her life.

Lady Alicia's visit came to an end in mid-autumn. She wished to enjoy part, at least, of the Indian summer of the New World, while she

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wished also to have the voyage across the ocean
well over before the fall storms set in severely.
Douglass accompanied her, while his mother, left
alone at Grassmere, had a number of benevolent
projects of her own to attend to. Mildred's mat-
ter-of-fact way of accepting uncongenial duty had
been powerful in influencing her friend. She had
never realized so clearly her own possibilities of
helpfulness, with the corresponding responsibili-
ties.

Douglass and Lady Alicia left one bright Oc-
tober morning. Mrs. Everett went to the steam-
ship and saw them away, and then, with a catch-
ing of breath at the thought of the lonely ocean
that would soon roll between herself and her boy,
she went directly to Mulberry Street. It was
early on Saturday morning, and the cottage was
undergoing its weekly garnishing, which Mildred
now performed for the most part alone. The
doors were standing open. A powerful hammering
back in the woodshed, where Paul was engaged
in some carpentering operation, effectually drowned
the sound of her gentle knock, so she went in,
following the sound of a scrubbing-brush, which
made itself heard above Paul's hammering. Mil-

dred was on her knees, the white, slender hands handling the brush as skillfully as a few hours later they would be applying paint to canvass.

Mrs. Everett paused in the doorway, a strange thrill of homely enjoyment at her heart, as she took in the pleasant scene. Everything was so beautifully clean. The stove shone like an ebony casket, the deal table and floor, from their dazzling whiteness, forming one of those fine contrasts that often occur naturally in unexpected places. Mildred's back was towards her, and she was singing, much as the birds sing, from very joy of living, the Pilgrim Song from Lohengrin. Her voice was finely modulated, while she gave sympathetically the expression the great Maestro might have approved. Mrs. Everett waited until the narrow piece of floor was completed, and then said softly:

"Good morning, Mildred, I did not know you could sing so well."

Mildred turned a very flushed face towards her visitor. "Have you been here long?" she asked, bestowing a nervous glance on her faded cotton wrapper.

"Long enough to hear the Pilgrim Song. But may I sit down in your dainty kitchen? My

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Pilgrim Song. But
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great-grandmother must have had such a one, for
it strikes a strangely responsive chord away down
in my heart."

"I shall enjoy remembering that our kitchen
has been brightened by your presence," Mil-
dred said, her accustomed ease of manner quite re-
gained. She brought an easy-chair and placed it
by the window, where a linnet was swinging on
its perch above the roses that crowded the win-
dow-sill.

"How charming!" Mrs. Everett exclaimed, as
she sank into the comfortable seat and turned to
the fragrant window. "Why, you have things more
homely and heartsome than anything at Grassmere,
my child! I wonder that you go into ecstasies
over our place."

Mildred smiled, and then excused herself. An
open book lay near, but Mrs. Everett found it
was only a school-book, with "Paul Kent, Esquire,"
written in various places in it. Mildred presently
returned — a fresh gown having replaced her scrub-
bing-robe.

"I am alone, and in my loneliness I came first to
you. An apology is due for my uncereemonious
morning call," Mrs. Everett said.

"An apology is never needed for your presence here." Mildred spoke so heartily, it reminded her companion of old-fashioned hospitality.

"I cannot describe the sense of desolation that nearly overpowered me, as if a terrible cloud were falling between us, as I said good-bye to my boy and saw him turn away. I had not realized, since my great trouble, what a world of farewells and bitter separations this is." The blue eyes filled with tears, as they looked at Mildred with a piteous appeal for consolation.

She was silent for a while as a swift sense came to her that her friend's desolation would be her own, and then she said softly: "God will have him in His keeping. You told me once that you had given your son to Him."

"We present our dearest ones to God, and then take them back again."

"And we often judge ourselves more harshly than our Heavenly Father judges us. But is not Douglass a Christian?"

"Yes; if the ocean swallowed him, I should feel certain he was safe with Christ."

"Then does it so much matter what world he is in if he is in harmony with God? Ever since my

mother assured me that our home in heaven would be better than Grassmere, I have looked upon death as a friend—a gentle friend. I cannot feel sorry for those who die in the Lord.”

“I thought you would smile at my fears, and assure me they would get across safely and my boy would come back; but you never look at things like the rest of us. And, dear, you have comforted me more than any one else could.” She drew the pure girlish face to her and kissed it lovingly. “I wish you were my own child, Mildred.”

“Don’t you think there are many things we can enjoy as much as if we really owned them, without having the care of them? I think I do.”

“If you belonged to me, I would not be compelled to go back to Grassmere alone.”

Mildred looked perplexed for a while, and then said timidly: “Did you ever take your dinner in such a very common house as this?”

“Your question is rather irrelevant to our conversation; but I have taken my dinner in much commoner houses. I think, my dear, this is a very uncommon home.”

“But I mean so plain and humble.”

“What are you preparing me for? Please do

not perplex me with conundrums," Mrs. Everett said, with a smile.

"If you would dine with us and stay with my mother while I take my lesson, I would then accompany you home; that is if you care to have me go."

"Thank you a thousand times. I would rather take my dinner here to-day than anywhere else on the continent. But my presence may interfere with your mother's plans."

"No, indeed. She is on a shopping expedition just now, with a lady who has her head so full of more important thoughts she has none to spare on the matter of dress. So she employs my mother to do that kind of thinking for her."

"And you will get the dinner all alone?"

"I always do on Saturdays and Sundays. They are my mother's holidays."

"I have never helped prepare a dinner in my life. May I help you?"

"Our dinner will not be like yours," Mildred said, with a flush. "You will wonder at my boldness in asking you to share it with us. But I am not used to having help, and I will get you a book while I am busy. There is a good while yet, however, before my work will begin."

Mildred brought her sewing, and soon they were absorbed in the most natural and intimate conversation they had ever held. Mildred described her school methods and the mission-school, with Mr. Felton's increasing congregation; several of the children having joined and brought their parents with them.

"I would like to have taken them to our own church," Mildred frankly confessed; "but it is overcrowded now. Besides, it did not seem honorable towards Mr. Felton, when he gave us such assistance, and they are such a help in filling the empty seats at St. Malachi's. Poor Mr. Felton looks younger now than he did when Paul and I used to slip into a back seat and listen to the prayers and sermon. He says he would be content if we would unite with him; but we shall never leave our own church."

"I believe we should love our church as we do our kindred," Mrs. Everett said, reflectively. "One never thinks of casting off one's family ties and adopting new ones."

"If no one had ever done so, we would still be in the darkness of the Mediæval ages. We should first make sure our church is in harmony with the

Bible. After that we may love her absorbingly. If the world continues to emerge into clearer light it is difficult for us to realize to what excellence Christians will attain in the lapse of years. I would like to have waited for the thirtieth century." Mildred's voice expressed much the same longing that the average girl's would have for a coveted article of attire or jewelry. Then, after a while, she said: "I suppose each one of us is specially created for the age in which we live, and anyway, I shall be somewhere in creation."

"If I permitted myself regrets on the subject, I should be sorry I was not a child of our first parents, with the traditions of Eden fresh about me. Think how many centuries of existence I have lost already. Indeed, I would not wish my advent into life postponed a day later than God gave it to me."

"I never thought of it in that way before."

Mildred sat for a good while thinking very intently on the subject, her needle flying in and out of the glossy silk she was fashioning.

"I cannot express how glad I am that God ever thought about me, that He ever made me," she said at last with an air of supreme satisfaction.

"I have been watching your face and wondering what your thoughts were so absorbed about. You seemed to forget the outside world."

"Yes, indeed. Even the dinner to which I have invited the friend, next to my mother, I love best in all the world."

"You dear child, why did you never tell me that before? You are so odd and reticent, I did not know you cared for me at all only as your eyes revealed it to me."

"It did not seem necessary to tell you. It would be like assuring the sun that his shining was agreeable."

"I shall pity your lover and husband if you are so silent with them."

"What more can a man ask than to have a woman give herself to him for life? If I ever do that, he may be sure I would give my life for him, if it were necessary for his highest good."

"I often wonder whom you will marry. Girls of your age generally have their head full of love and marriage. Won't you confess to me? Do you never think about your fairy prince?"

"I must wait until I know if he has been created for me," Mildred said, with a rose tint flush.

ing cheek and brow. "I would rather talk of other things, anyway."

"Oh, you shy, perfect maiden! You almost make me wish I was a lad to woo and win you myself. You would take me for Grassmere, I suppose?"

"If I loved you I would take you for yourself, if you came to me in Tommy Tufts' form, and with his prospects."

"Yes, you are unworldly enough for anything. I expect nothing else than you will throw yourself away on some of those mission-school lads — that Carver boy, perhaps."

"I do not think Jack was created for me. I really hope not."

"You have thought on the subject then?"

"Jack has spoken to me about it. He thinks it is my duty. His life has been so unblessed by womankind."

"Your duty, — people outside of royalties do not have to marry from duty — that is the penalty that class have to pay for their honors. Tell Jack never to think of such a thing again."

"I certainly will. One must not carry duty too far, I think." The girlish face brightened, and she began preparations for dinner.

"That girl is the oddest mixture of genius and innocence — genuine, childish innocence — I ever knew," Mrs. Everett said to herself, as she watched Mildred flitting gracefully to and fro, as she went about her homely duties.

Mrs. Everett had scarcely tasted the dainty breakfast, prepared for herself and the travelers, so that Mildred's dinner soon began to send forth a very appetizing flavor. She watched the deft-handed girl as she laid the cloth for dinner — a bit of damask, fine and white enough to spread the board for a princess, while upon it she placed dishes and glasses that were cherished heirlooms of the family. Presently there were voices at the door, and, a moment after, Mrs. Kent, looking tired and worried, entered with the lady with literary tastes. Mrs. Everett instantly recognized the latter as a person with excellent lungs, who nowhere felt so perfectly at home as when on a platform with a sea of human faces before her, to whom she could lecture by the hour. Mrs. Kent with a quick lifting of countenance greeted Mrs. Everett, while her companion cast a longing glance at the dinner-table. But Mrs. Kent's patience was so near a termination, she decided to get rid of her tiresome customer.

"I will take you to another room and fit your dress directly; so that you need be no longer detained."

The woman assured her that she was in no hurry whatever; but Mrs. Kent could be as dignified as her proudest customer, when occasion demanded. Mildred looked relieved when she saw the door close behind her. "I was afraid mamma would not be firm, and she would have spoiled all our pleasure. Do you think intellectual people are different from others? She is the only literary person I have ever met."

"You innocent child! Why do you call her literary?"

"Why, she tells us herself that she is. She says her name will go echoing down the ages for thousands of years. Sometimes I hope people will forget about her before that time."

"Are you envious of her?"

"I hope not; but she does tire us dreadfully."

"She is a very common-place woman; but she has the faculty of getting people to listen to her nonsense."

"It is a relief to hear that. She wastes a great deal of our time, but one feels it to be a duty to

make sacrifices for clever people. You feel as if you may be helping in the multiplication of ideas and books by saving them their worry and work."

"Your own ideas are vastly superior to any her brain can manufacture," Mrs. Everett murmured, as Mildred passed out of ear-shot, on her culinary duties intent.

The dinner, though limited in the number of courses, was excellent, while their guest enjoyed it more, by way of variety, than one of her own elaborate dinners that cost ten times the amount of time and money.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CLOSE BY THE GATES.

THE days wore on until Mrs. Everett began to look feverishly for a cablegram from Douglass, while others besides her shared her anxiety. Mildred was at Grassmere now nearly every day. No one was able to cheer the lonely woman like the calm, pale-faced girl who was herself growing whiter every day, but bore her anxieties silently, while still maintaining that Douglass was in safety somewhere. There had been a terrible gale about the time they might be expected to enter the channel, which had disabled or completely wrecked many vessels. The days at Grassmere were passed now, by its heavy-hearted mistress, in waiting for tidings from the

shipping office, the nights in wakefulness or fitful dreams, in which she saw her boy struggling in the wild, angry seas or food for fishes in the ocean's horrible, slimy depths. How vividly his bright face and cheery presence came before her mind, with the hopes that had been centered in him for years and which his early manhood promised to have fulfilled! Friends came with their words of cheer but they brought for the most part as little consolation with them as those friends of the mourner in the land of Uz. Death to most of them seemed little better than annihilation; but when Mildred Kent brought her work and sat beside the desolate one, their conversation drifted beyond the ocean's depths or the tiresome round of life to broader and clearer regions, where the soul finds its endless resting-place, though engaged, no doubt, in unceasing activities.

"I believe God directed you to me, and has been preparing you for my comfort all these years," Mrs. Everett said to Mildred one evening. All hope had well-nigh ceased, and even Mildred no longer ventured to contradict the general verdict, save in the solitude of Mrs. Everett's room.

No doubt this assurance on Mildred's part had

XXI.

GATES.

Mrs. Everett began a cablegram from s besides her shared Grassmere now nearly to cheer the lonely faced girl who was day, but bore her ll maintaining that ewhere. There had e time they might be el, which had disa- many vessels. The ed now, by its heavy- for tidings from the

kept the mother from utter prostration of heart; for she shared with Mrs. Kent a little superstition respecting this sixth sense with which Mildred seemed to be endowed.

The wind howled dismally without, the freezing December air penetrated the closely curtained windows, making the desolate mourner shudder at thought of her boy, tossing somewhere on the wild, stormy seas.

"If I only knew that he was sheltered somewhere to-night, even if it was under a mound in Greenwood, I could be content," she moaned. "And have you, too, ceased to hope?"

"Yes, I have ceased to hope; for you all say to do so is useless. I only feel that he is still living; that is more assuring than hope. It seems like those vivid impressions of childhood that rarely deceived me."

They sat for a long time in silence, only the rustle of Mildred's work, as she busily plied her needle, broke the stillness; for no matter what the care or sorrow, she still worked on. Time seemed too precious to rush by unimproved, while Mrs. Everett confessed to being comforted by Mildred's industrious ways.

"When you are not here," she said to her, "it seems as if there were a perpetual funeral going on in the house; but you bring back, with your hands full of work, a sense of life and comfort."

Mrs. Everett lay down on the sofa which Mildred drew up within the circle of the firelight.

"Won't you sing something? I am afraid if I do not grow calmer I shall lose my senses."

Mildred went to the piano and presently the room was filled with the comforting strains of old English hymns that have kept many a despairing heart from utterly breaking. The loving All-Father seemed nearer and more precious, His care more unfailling as the mourner listened. The tears forced themselves through the hot lids, bringing ease to the heart, and for the first time in her awful anxiety she was enabled to say truly,—"Thy will be done." The household was summoned at last to the customary reading of prayers. When the exercises were ended, the servants went with sorrowful faces from the room; while Mildred continued some time longer to read the Bible aloud. She closed the book at last, for it was growing late, and she had to be early astir on account of her school, when a sudden ringing of the door-

bell surprised them, and a few moments after the servant ushered a gentleman into the room, covered with snow, but his face shining with pleasure. Mrs. Everett sprang to her feet, for it was one of the owners of the ill-fated steamship.

"You have news for me. Is my boy alive?"

"Yes; he is among the saved."

"Where is he? Will he be home to-night?"

"We only had a cablegram, very brief, of course; but it gives the names of the survivors. The ship foundered in the gale; the crew and passengers took to the boats. Only two of the latter have been heard from. They were picked up by a sailing vessel bound for Lisbon. Your son is there now."

"When shall we get further tidings?"

"In a few days at furthest. Meanwhile you will know everything is being done for them that is possible; they were subject to considerable exposure, and may not be able to come directly."

Mrs. Everett looked alarmed. "Douglass is little more than a boy yet, but with all a man's daring and unselfishness, I shall leave in the next boat for England."

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dred expected, encouraged the undertaking. She
looked at him keenly. He met her gaze, and in
his face she read more than his lips uttered. He
sat for some time making suggestions about the
journey, and at last said: "Will you go alone?"

Mrs. Everett looked wistfully at Mildred:—
"Won't you come with me?"

"Yes, if my mother will consent, and the school-
trustees."

"I will arrange it with the latter. May I send
a messenger to-night to your mother? I could
get some sleep if I knew you were to be with
me."

"I will write a few lines while the man is get-
ting ready. Shall I ring?"

"I will go myself and tell him. You will find
writing materials in my desk."

When she had left the room Mildred turned
abruptly to Mr. Brenton: "You have not told us
all. Was Mr. Everett hurt?"

"He is dangerously ill in the hospital at Lis-
bon. He robbed himself probably of both food
and clothing for the sake of the women and chil-
dren."

When Mrs. Everett returned the note was

written and the messenger was despatched with it. The answer he brought back was what Mildred expected; and but for the secret Mr. Brenton had confided to her, she would have been a most happy girl that night at the prospect of a journey across the ocean and to the historic shores that she had so longed to look upon. Mrs. Everett seemed her old, happy self again as she kissed Mildred good-night. Mildred was early astir and without waiting to disturb Mrs. Everett started for home in the grey dawn. Her mother's face looked sad. Plainly it was not a joy to her, as to her daughter, this stormy ocean voyage and long separation. The trunk was packed and preparations all completed when the carriage came for her. With sorrowful hearts and tear-dimmed eyes her mother and Paul and Grace bade her good-bye.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

THAT ocean voyage was full of joy to Mildred. Probably no other voyage would be just equal to it in her existence. The unexpected usually happens, for, after a stormy fall, the winter set in with balmy breezes and serene skies. The moon was approaching the full, so that Mildred watched not only sunrises and sunsets, but the moon too, as it rolled up behind a world of waters, making her shimmering pathway across wide leagues of tossing waves. She had no wish to join the other passengers in hastening the flight of time, that seemed all too brief wherein to crowd her wonderful experiences. The only book she cared for now was the Bible. It alone seemed to

be in keeping with the music of the southing wind and the moan of the never-weary sea. The other passengers watched the tall, fair-faced girl sitting in some sheltered nook, reading and watching the sea by turns. She seemed, however, to have little more curiosity about themselves than the sea-gulls that occasionally circled about the masts. A new light came into her face that Mrs. Everett fancied she had never seen there before—a look of deepest content, as if life's perplexities had vanished before the vastness of nature. She had never before come into such harmonious contact with it, for the country had been a sealed book, save in the glimpses got through the lawns and flower-gardens of Grassmere.

As they neared the English Channel the weather changed and the ship's officers began to scan the distant horizon and sky with greater intentness. In conversation with a friendly sailor, Mildred was charmed to hear that a storm was expected; and while every other soul on board devoutly hoped that in the race between wind and steam the latter might win, Mildred as eagerly wished she might see the green restless ocean in its wildest fury. Even to be enveloped by it and

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carried to the still depths below; for the long sleep did not seem terrible—rather to be preferred than the wearying sickness and narrow bed of those who die on land.

The steamship made excellent time, but the storm had stronger propelling power; for it caught them ere they had reached the shelter of docks; but only from the closed state-room could Mildred enjoy the war of elements,—Mrs. Everett positively forbidding the risk of a peep on deck. Mildred sat with eager shining eyes reveling in the mad plunges of the ship, as it fought with the elements, trying to imagine what the wild sky and wilder ocean looked like in one of its clearing-up moods. At last, to the great relief of every one else, they were safely moored at the dock, when Mildred, with throbbing pulses, saw the land that after all was her real home, where her ancestors for a score of generations had lived and loved and died. It was not, however, until they had got beyond the smoke and crowds of Liverpool that she really felt at home; but as they swept past cottages nestling amid trees, bare and leafless now, and stately mansions, the haunting feeling that she had seen it long before came viv-

idly, making her believe that through other eyes now long gone to dust, she was looking on a familiar scene. Mrs. Everett's hotel was in a fashionable square, whither they went directly. She had felt certain of meeting Douglass at the station, having telegraphed to Mr. Inglis, the proprietor of the hotel, just before leaving New York; but to her great disappointment there was no one waiting for them at the depot. On reaching her hotel she learned the full particulars of the shipwreck, and of her son's heroism and self-forgetfulness, thereby imperilling his own life; but she did not know how dangerously ill he were until the telegrams that had been coming for several days in expectation of her arrival were produced. Mildred opened the yellow envelopes herself, for Mrs. Everett was nearly prostrated by grief and disappointment. The first read, "Your son very low; we still have hopes." The next, a day later, "Crisis not yet reached, but fever increasing." The last, "Come directly if you wish to see him alive."

Mrs. Everett turned to Mr. Inglis:—"How can we get there quickest, by land or water?"

"By all means take the land route. At this season it is safest and the speediest."

"When can we make connections at Dover?"

"You will have three hours to rest, and then be in time to take the train at Charing Cross for the night boat. I will see you safely on board the cars. You need have no further anxiety about it, but try and get some rest, and a little sleep, if possible."

She thanked him, when he withdrew, leaving the two alone. Mildred tucked her up comfortably in bed, drawing the curtains closely, hoping she might get the much needed sleep, and then went to a window anxious to catch every possible glimpse of London. The crowded street and huge brick buildings seemed little different from what she was accustomed to, but the associations were not the same. Centuries before the New World had been trodden by any save the red man's foot, this same street had been the centre of active life. Men and women had passed to and fro upon it talking, it may be, of their good King Alfred, or the wild doings of the cruel Normans; or speculating as to the success of the Crusaders, or eager of the news of the martyrdom of Cranmer and Wyckliffe, or the execution of the fair Anne Boleyn. Shakespeare had no doubt walked there

in company with Shylock and Romeo and Juliet and those other wonderful children of his brain, less like shadows of the people of to-day than the men and women who walked the streets with him. A knock at the door disturbed the fancy that had gone so far afield, and with it the summons to be shortly in readiness for another journey of a thousand miles and more. When she entered Mrs. Everett's room the table was laid for quite an elaborate dinner.

"Must we eat again so soon?" she asked with some consternation, for they had been supplied with hot cocoa and toast when they came.

"You are in England now, where eating is the extreme of fashion," Mrs. Everett said with a wan smile. "But we may not have such a comfortable dinner for some time, and I want you to enjoy it."

"And you?"

"I shall dine and sup on sorrow for the rest of my life, I fear. I find it soon surfeits." She burst into a passionate fit of weeping, which alarmed Mildred, who had not learned that the most dangerous grief is tearless. The woman waiting on them had known Mrs. Everett for years, and said

tenderly. "Ah, that will do you good, ma'am — I was hoping to see you cry." There was something so strong and patient about her that Mildred took a liking to her at once, that increased as she saw more of her through the coming years. Mr. Inglis soon came to take them to the station, and after that the hours went slowly as they left mile after mile behind them, though Mildred watched with eager eyes the constantly shifting landscape from the car window. Distant mountains, a glimpse now and then of the ocean, villages and quiet hamlets, long stretches of lovely country, with now and then a busy city, lay in their line of travel — until at last their journey was ended. They had left the winter somewhere behind them, and it seemed delightful to step out into the warmth and sunshine of May. They went directly to the hospital, finding it a gloomy-looking building, presided over by dull-faced monks and nuns, whose natures had become dolorous by reason of their surroundings. Mrs. Everett shuddered as she explained her errand, in French, to a hard-faced monk who listened stolidly, and then conducted them through long, dimly-lighted corridors to the cot where Douglass lay tossing in the delirium of fever. But it was such

rapture to know there was life, if nothing more, that her face after a time lost something of its ashen hue. This English milord, as they reckoned him, received the best their hospital afforded in the way of nourishment, attendance and skill; and the monk led the two ladies to the sick bed, with a very conscious air of deserving their thanks. Douglass was terribly changed; but still his mother did not require the name marked on his linen to prove his identity. As Mildred stood looking at him, the conviction came that with his mother's prayers and tender ministries, his case was far from hopeless.

"You will give us directions and permit us to assist in taking care of him?" she asked the doctor, who was at the bedside. The construction and grammar she found quite easy but her tongue did not work so readily as her brain in a strange language. He gave her to understand it was contrary to their rules to permit strangers such privileges. Mrs. Everett spoke eagerly: "We will pay any sum you name for the privilege."

He shook his head doubtfully, but Mildred fancied there was a wavering look in his face. "Tell him Douglass will be sure to get well if

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he has those he knows about him," she urged Mrs. Everett to say. Whether it was the two pleading faces, or the hope of a rich gift to the hospital, that influenced him, they could not decide; but he began to relent and promised to lay their case before the authorities, and in the meantime gave them permission to remain until a decision was arrived at. Then, recommending a hotel that was near at hand, he despatched a messenger for the luggage.

Tired and travel-stained though Mrs. Everett and Mildred were, they did not think of rest until they had first attended to Douglass. Mildred discovered the scarcity of ice, and soon had that most necessary article abundantly supplied, while many another comfort usual in sick rooms was also conspicuous by its absence.

"My poor boy, how he has suffered!" the mother moaned. Meanwhile she very vigorously set about having a radical change made in his attendance. Mildred was a novice in a sick room save what she had learned among such families as the Carvers; but she had a genuine woman's nature, and the light touch and healing instinct came to her naturally. More than this, her cheerfulness and cour-

age upheld them when they were ready to despair. The fever turned, and Douglass still lived; but the vital forces were so overdrawn, the question was whether nature could ultimately rally. The alternations of hope and despair were bitter, but when the delirium was passed the mother found an alleviation of her pain in the look of recognition in her son's face. He was too weak to show surprise when he saw them at his bedside. At first in the dim light he mistook Mildred for Lady Alicia; but one morning she was surprised to hear her own name whispered.

"Are you here, too, Mildred?"

"Yes."

"When did you come?"

"With your mother, a week ago."

"And Alicia; is she not here?"

"She had left for England before we came."

He asked no more questions; and after that Mildred did not hear her name mentioned. But she wondered if it was the usual custom with ladies of rank to leave their dearest friends to the care of strangers when near the gates of death.

As the days wore on, the fear grew stronger in the hearts of those who tended him that Doug-

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IN THE HOSPITAL.

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lass had been seized with a speedy decline; and
but for Mildred's bright face and cheerful words,
both he and his mother would have given up
hope. In every other face he read the hopeles-
ness of his case; but when he turned to her, as
she bent over him, bathing his hot face and ad-
ministering medicine and nourishment with the
thousand other offices the loving watcher by the
sick-bed ministers, he seemed to gain the inspira-
tion of courage and strength from her strong vital-
ity.

"When the summer comes, and we get you home
to Grassmere, you will get well directly," she said
one day, when the conversation had been drifting
dangerously near to death-beds and graves. "A
long rest there, and work for a good many years
before heaven's rest will come," she said, so cheer-
ily, that he asked:—

"How can you speak so certainly? Every one
else, by their faces, assure me that I will never
do any work again."

"Perhaps it is the Lord," she said solemnly. "I
have asked for your life a great many times, and
I always feel that my prayer will be granted."

"Be it unto you according to your faith," Mrs.
Everett murmured fervently.

"If I get better you will have more to do with it than doctors, or anybody, I believe. Your face is like a tonic amid the surrounding gloom."

"It would be grand missionary work to help you to live," Mildred said with great satisfaction. "You can do so much good with your money and talents."

"You are still thinking of missionary work?"

"Yes, I have the impression that I shall be one some day, the same as I have that you will get well."

"The prospect for the latter is very poor just now, but who knows what miracles are ahead of us? I may be well, and you a missionary, in the course of time."

"I do not think it would be a miracle for me to be a missionary. It is just the overcoming of a few obstacles — that is, if God wants me."

"But you cannot be a missionary and artist both. My mother tells me your teacher expects great things from you some day."

Mildred looked at Mrs. Everett with flushed, surprised face. "Did he speak to you about me?"

"Oh yes, several times. But you seem so indifferent to praise, I did not repeat his words to you."

"I am not accustomed to it, but if I believed I was worthy of it, I would like it," she said honestly.

"I am glad to hear you confess to that weakness, if it is a weakness. Most persons disclaim their liking for it, but they are the ones usually most eager to have the admiration of their fellows," Douglass said.

"If I were away on some beautiful island where it is always summer, I could teach and paint, too. I would have few distractions."

"But what would be the use of painting, there would be no one to admire or buy your pictures."

"I would need very little money among those simple people."

"You have reached an altitude of unworldliness so elevated, it nearly takes my breath away."

"Your breath is very short just now."

"It would have the same effect on me if I were a prize fighter."

"That is a healthy remark. You will live to be an athlete yet."

"Not if I must lie on this tiresome cot in this gloomy room."

"Be patient just a little while, and we shall get

you out of this hospital. It will be like passing into another world to get into an easy carriage and go out on the lovely lanes and country roads outside of Lisbon. I am anticipating the pleasure we three will have admiring all those beautiful bits of scenery together, instead of one alone."

"Then you have quite decided not to send me to the cemetery," he said with a cheerfulness that charmed his mother.

"I have never felt as if we should plant you there and go back alone to Grassmere. There is such a long stretch of life in the next world, I like to hold closely to this one that is so brief, and yet so important, and to have others who may be a help to this world do the same."

"I like to hear you talk that way. Generally you seem so unworldly, and like some stray spirit from brighter places than our earth, that you give me an uncanny feeling very often," he said, while watching her getting ready for her daily walk in the park and public gardens.

"Must I get a printed placard with the assurance that I am of the earth, and fasten it like the Jews' phylacteries on my forehead?" she asked with a smile that was still not joyous.

HERO.

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"It would be useless. We should still remain
unconvinced," Douglass said, shaking his head as
if the case were hopeless.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOME AGAIN.

WHEN the June roses were in bloom, and Grassmere looking like another new-created Eden, Mrs. Everett and Douglass came home. The latter was still something of an invalid, but all immediate danger was passed. Mildred was glad to get home to Mulberry Street too, although the months she had spent loitering in the splendid art-galleries of Rome and Paris and London, and in the concert halls of those great cities, had been the realization of a dream that with the majority of people is never fulfilled. There was a good deal of discouragement mixed with her eagerness to be again at her easel; for she had brought back with her humbling ideas of her ability to ac-

compleish anything worthy the expenditure of time and money, or to add pictures to the vast number preserved so carefully by the great cities in their splendid galleries of paintings.

Some weeks after her arrival home, she calmly announced to her mother that she was going to offer herself directly to the Mission-Board for service in any part of the world they chose to appoint her.

"I am surprised, Mildred, to hear you say that. I thought you had decided to be an artist. You have such a love for painting."

"I have thought about that. Pictures are not specially needed in the world now; at least you would not think so if you were to visit the crowded galleries. Besides, I cannot feel free to give myself up wholly to art."

"But you have such talent for it, and I have hoped to see you famous."

"I would like to have people look at my pictures with admiration, but they would go away and soon forget picture and painter, and not be really helped either to love God or help their generation, by looking at them. If I can do the people good themselves, that will be a work done

that will last forever. I think those who do such work are the ones the angels reckon famous."

"My life will be very desolate without you, my child."

"You will know I am in the world loving you still, and in God's keeping, doing His will."

"If God calls you, that must decide."

Mildred was silent; but at last, raising her eyes, which were full of tears, she said: "You must not think it is no hardship for me to leave you and the children and my other friends; and I would choose to be a painter, if it were right; but I have found my work lies far off from all that I love best. Maybe God wants me to go away alone, to show me how much He can be to me, because it cannot make much difference about my work; for I am only a weak girl, with little power or influence."

"You will not lack those qualities, Mildred, if you give yourself up entirely to the Lord. I will bid you God-speed, and send you cheerfully to the remotest corner of the earth, if the Lord calls you."

"We shall have a long eternity together, mother."

Mildred's voice trembled as she spoke; but after that neither renewed the conversation again. When the answer came to her application, and they found that she was to be sent the Indians in Dakota, there was a very perceptible lightening of countenances in the family circle at No. 6 Mulberry Street. The salary was so much in excess of her expectations, that she began to think the chances for self-immolation were greatly inferior to what they once were. Now they could send Paul through college; and if he was only able to do his part, he might make choice of any profession, and be able to succeed.

She went out to Grassmere one bright morning in August, to carry her good news. How fair Mother Earth looked as Mildred walked under the trees; the busy sparrows hopping along at her side; the higher-toned birds carrying on their loves and industries in the leafy fastnesses, or higher still, a little below the clouds in the far blue ocean of ether!

It seemed so grand to her as she walked there, very indifferent to the fine carriages with their elegant occupants rolling past, to be in harmony with the God who made all this beauty and to work

for Him—to be His. She scarcely confessed to herself she had a fancy as to what earthly love might mean; but resolutely pushing such thoughts away she found her joy—perhaps a higher one—in letting her life be a thoroughfare for the sinful and weary-hearted, rather than for the one who might have been too idolatrously loved. Her face was beautifully serene as she halted, according to custom, on the marble steps, and looked around at a scene such as she might not again feast her eyes on, after she had said good-bye to friends and home, until the heaven which Grassmere had helped to make real should become her eternal habitation. As she stood, after ringing the bell, in the hush that pervaded earth and air, from the distant music-room there came the heavy tones of the great pipe-organ. The maid who answered her summons informed her that a good many visitors had come within a day or two, and that now a music professor, all the way from Germany, was playing on the organ.

“Will you go right in? There’s so many they won’t know but you’ve been here right along,” she said encouragingly, for Mildred was especially liked by the Grassmere servants.

"I can listen just as well outside the door of the music-room."

"For my part I think it sounds better outside. He makes such a noise sometimes, you'd think the whole house shook. I've had to be in and out a good many times with messages."

As Mildred listened, the sounds produced were certainly very uncommon. The music, for the most part, was new to her; but she was thrilled as by the thunder's roll or roar of ocean. A voice within her, or so it seemed, whispered: "What a loss, to go off among uncivilized people and never listen to such harmonies again!" She listened dreamily to the sob and swell of the organ responding to the touch of its master like a thing of life. Suddenly the measure changed to a minor key, and a new spirit spoke to her. It was as if voices of the lowly and sorrowful were crying for succor with an infinite despair to those who could help, but were at ease. Dusky hands seemed lifted in pleading and sad faces were turning to the darkness of death without knowledge or hope of the hereafter. The tears fell softly on the dimpled folded hands, nor were they tears of regret,—rather of gladness, for the music had brought its message

of strength. It was like a battle-call to duty, while presently the fancy grew upon her that there is in music a spirit which, in other worlds, we may see embodied in form of splendid seraphim. At last the organist ceased, and then through the half-closed door there issued pleasantly modulated voices, from the flute-like tones from girlish lips to the deep bass of the burly German Professor. Then they began drifting out into the wide hall where Mildred was sitting. They were all strangers, until at last Douglass appeared in the door. He soon spied her sitting apart from the rest, a trifle ill at ease, and he came directly to her. "You have come to spend the day?" he questioned, eagerly. She cast an eloquent look first at her own simple morning costume and then at his guests, and shook her head.

"Never mind," he whispered, with manly disregard of such trifles; "You look better than any of them."

"How can you say that!" she said, with a smile.

"I will leave it, if you are willing, to the gentlemen present to decide." He turned mischievously around and cleared his throat.

"Oh, no no! I will go right home."

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"Then I shall drive you, and it will be cruel
 to take me out in the dust this morning, you have
 no idea how it makes me cough."

"I thought your cough was nearly well," she
 said, anxiously.

"It is not so bad when I keep out of the dust,"
 he said drily. "We are going to have luncheon
 under the trees, and afterward a sail on the lake.
 The bottom is fastened securely in the boat; I ex-
 amined it myself, to make your mind easy, for I
 expect you will spend a great many hours in it
 after this." He smiled down into the rather wist-
 ful face; for Mildred thought the hours were very
 few that she would spend on the leaf-bound lake.

Mrs. Everett presently joined them. "You are
 just in time, dear, for a long day's outing. Our
 visitors are all strangers to you, I think. You
 will let me present you," she said, taking Mildred's
 arm.

She was charmed especially with Professor von
 Staaden, her eyes wandering by turns from his
 mobile, intellectual face to the long, muscular fin-
 gers, which had such skill and strength to bring
 out the organ's hidden harmony. Before very long
 he had discovered her hero-worship for men and

women of genius, and repeated story after story from personal reminiscences, more for the pleasure of looking into the eager, enthusiastic face than for any particular interest he took in them, save for the gifts they had conferred on the world.

"I would like so much just once to touch hands and speak with some one who will be admired five hundred years hence," she said at last with a sigh of regret at the improbability of her desire ever being fulfilled.

"What gain would there be in that?"

"It would seem to keep one in touch with an age so remote from us. It is melancholy to look ahead a century or two and know that sun and earth and men will not know we ever lived. One's great-grandchildren might hold our memory for a century, but probably not for two," she said soberly. The professor smiled to hear this pure-faced girl talk in such a matter-of-fact way of possible great-grandchildren.

"But we have our lives now, and they are very good. What need we think of centuries long after we are dead?"

"I know it is childish, but it grieves me to think there will be a time when Grassmere will

not retain the faintest memory if its present gentle mistress, who makes so many glad."

"It is the fate of nearly all who come into the world. Is Cleopatra any happier to be remembered now than the forgotten beauties of her day?"

"I should much prefer the fate of the forgotten ones," Mildred said, cheerfully.

"Then you will acknowledge it is only a morbid sentiment, this longing to be held in remembrance by generations coming after you."

"I am enjoying this day very much, even with the certainty of ultimate annihilation of all trace of me under the sun. It will be one of the days I shall relive when alone, and perhaps a bit sorrowful."

"Yes?" he said; with the rising inflection of voice which means so much when politeness forbids a question outright.

"I am going away," she explained, seeing the questioning look in his face. "I have been accepted as missionary teacher to the Indians of Dakota."

He started with surprise. "Why is that? Pardon me, must you do it from necessity?"

Mildred smiled gently: "The same necessity, to

compare the small with the great, that compelled St. Paul to tell people of Christ and the way to be happy forever."

The professor was silent. Perhaps he thought they had remained long enough apart from the rest for he presently proposed joining them. On their way Mildred said:—"I should like to have some more of your music by-and-by. I could not tell you how it helped me to forget myself this morning. Probably I shall never hear such music again until I get away up there." She raised her eyes to the sky above them—not more serene than they.

"I am sorry you have chosen such a lot."

Douglass joined them then, and the professor said: "Did you know your friend here is going away? To Dakota, is it not?" he said, turning to Mildred. Douglass stopped abruptly.

"Nonsense! She is not going anywhere until her teacher says we may send her to Italy."

"But she is going to teach the Indians, she tells me, and that very soon."

"Can that be true, Mildred? Surely you would have told us first." There was surprise and pain both in his voice.

"I came out on purpose to tell you to-day. I should not have mentioned it to Professor Von Staaden only that his music helped me to be strong this morning," she said, with a break in her voice.

"Then you would rather stay with us, and go on with the painting?"

"It is not what one would rather do, but what God wills."

"But there are plenty to go who have not your prospects. It will be no loss to have them buried a few years among savages. You must not go, Mildred."

She brushed away a few tears, and then quickly regaining her self-control said quite calmly: "We won't spoil this perfect day, with arguments. Let us cease thinking of any day after this."

"I cannot do that. We must spend hundreds of other days just as perfect together. You would rob me of all chance to pay the debt I owe you. Do you know, Professor, I believe that but for Miss Kent I should be in my grave? You have no idea how clever she is — entirely too clever to waste herself on a parcel of dull Indians."

"Please, Douglass, let us leave that topic."

He looked down curiously at her. Only once

before had she spoken his name in his hearing. Some way it never sounded so musically from any lips as hers. He would willingly have heard it drop lingeringly from her lips very often. "I want to enjoy the boat-sail, but cannot unless you give me the promise."

"It's a melancholy fate to be an only child. They are never content unless they have their own way," Mildred remarked sympathetically.

"And you must help to spoil me." She did not give the promise, however. She had no other opportunity that day to discuss the question further with Douglass, or his mother either. She was grieved to learn that he was opposed to her work. She had not expected anything of the kind; rather she had looked for their hearty congratulations that the plans of her youth were being fulfilled.

When she got home in the evening, she found a letter from the Mission-Board awaiting her, with the request that she would start for her new field of labor directly. Her face grew pale as she read, and there was a very perceptible tremor in her voice. Grace laid her book away and began to cry, while Paul left the room trying to whistle,

but it ended in a dismal failure. The mother's face suddenly paled. But she said bravely: "It is an honor, my child, to be called so young by the Lord to make such a sacrifice for His work."

"You are willing to let me go, mother?"

"Yes, willing, though a little heartsore at the long separation. But we shall have a meeting by-and-by, to be followed by no farewell."

For some time there was silence save for Grace's suppressed weeping, and then the mother said, with her accustomed cheerfulness: "Did you have a nice visit?"

"Yes."

"What do they say about your going to Dakota?"

"I had no good opportunity to mention it to Mrs. Everett, but Douglass spoke strongly against it. Only think! he spoke as if they meant to send me to Italy after I got through with my teacher here. Things generally happen that way. The good we crave for half a life-time comes just too late."

"You must not think of what might have been. God loves a cheerful giver."

"It has been a trying day, and I am a trifle gloomy to-night."

"Why has it been trying?"

"Oh, everything was so lovely there, and I dreaded the thought that it was one of my last visits—the very last, if I had but known—and then Douglass seemed so sorry," Paul added, speaking softly.

Paul was summoned and they had prayers, and no more was said that night about the approaching separation. Mildred went out to Grassmere again the following day to say good-bye, but found them all away. She left a message for Mrs. Everett and Douglass and then went to see Mr. Felton and her other friends. There was a painful sameness in their remarks, for each and all seemed to think she could do as acceptable mission work at home as to go away among Indians.

The hour came all too soon when the farewell had to be taken of the dear ones whose faces indexed the pain they felt at separation. And the journey began without the pleasing anticipation of a congenial termination among friends and happy surroundings, which so greatly helps to lighten the tedium of a long and solitary journey.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

MISSION WORK.

THREE years were spent in a school far away from town or even village, in a desolate region where neither stream nor hill were visible, and scarcely a tree worthy of the name was in reach of Mildred's long-sighted vision. At first there was a natural home-sickness and bitter loneliness as days wore into months; but there came also a growing delight while she watched the slow but sure unfolding of character in her dusky pupils, making her grow more content with her field of labor. The children by degrees caught the infection of her enthusiasm, their dull faces lighting up in response to her eager attempts to waken their slow intellects. Her religion was so much a part

of her nature that it influenced the minutest actions as well as words of her daily intercourse with them, while in her own experience things unseen were becoming more real and delightful than anything connected with this world. There was, for these half-civilized boys and girls, a peculiar fascination in her descriptions of the spirit-world, — its inhabitants, its glories, and the occupations that were in no danger of interruption by death. All the employments of their daily life, their lessons, their relations to each other and parents and friends they were taught to regard in the light of unending existences and the worth or worthlessness of all worldly things as measured by these. Her modes of instruction were not regulated after any models she had herself been taught, while for each one she had special rules which she considered best suited to his or her individual needs. Her classes were not trained like masses of soldiers under drill as is now-a-days the rule, as if children could be cast in moulds like so many candles. And day by day, as she saw her work changing the actions and habits of thought of her pupils, it brought a contentment of heart that she had never found at her easel. Each morning was welcomed with fresh

satisfaction as she looked out over the day's duties; each evening with thankfulness at the measure of success that had crowned the labors of the day. There were discouragements and bitter heart-aches over the ineradicable taint sin had left in some of her charges, while grace and patience were alike proved to the utmost in dealing with these. And so the days and months had flowed on until they rolled into years, without a glimpse of one familiar face. She tried to hush the cry in her heart for mother and home and the familiar scenes of youth by cultivating a home-feeling for her sphere of toil. By day, amid its ceaseless activities, she had a measure of success; but in the hours of wakefulness that once had been passed in pleasant fancies or star-gazing, the old heart-hunger for them all came back in full force. She had painted them so many times, as well as the friends at Grassmere, that her pupils seemed as well acquainted with them as with the dignified principal of the school, who really took less part in it than a benevolent neighbor might do if such there had been in the vicinity of the school. Towards the close of her third year her mother, for the first time, expressed a wish for her return home; and asked that

it might be immediate. With some surprise, but a sudden lightening of heart, she received the command, and prepared to obey it. There were still some six weeks remaining before the school closed for the summer holidays; but they were the very gladdest weeks perhaps she had ever experienced. Only those who have denied themselves for duty's sake, and still, in obedience to duty, accept what their hearts cry out for passionately, can understand the full measure of her gladness. She bade her pupils good-bye:—a few weeks separation from their teacher did not affect them seriously, and they watched her departure with stolid faces. Each station reached on that journey sent a thrill of pleasure to her heart; and when the final one was reached, and a glimpse was caught of her mother, so little changed that it might have been yesterday that she had parted from her, she felt it was worth while having been created for the rapture concentrated in that brief moment. Mildred ran to her outwardly calm, only the shining eyes and glad face betraying any unusual emotion; but she was not prepared for the vigorous grasp in which her hands were seized by a tall, handsome youth, and her lips saluted in most impetuous fashion.

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"Is it Paul?" she asked, amazed; for no other
lad would act in such unseemly fashion.

"Don't you know me, Mildred, that you ask that
question?"

"I would never think it was my dear brother
Paul," she said, squeezing the hands that still were
holding her own. "And is this Grace?" she asked,
turning to a slender golden-haired maiden who very
slightly resembled the sister she had left.

Jack Carver was there too, with a full-grown
moustache and stylish cane, and looking generally
so comfortable that one would never have taken
him for a member of the Carver family. After
they got home from the station and the tea had
been taken, and they sat chatting in the twilight,
they found, — though Mildred had changed little in
either looks or costume, for they could see her
garments were the same she took with her and the
fashion unaltered, — it was not the same Mildred that
had left them. The solitude of soul in which her
days had been passed had matured and elevated her,
as it only can do the noblest natures. Jack stayed
so late their patience was nearly ended with him;
for in these first hours it was each other they want-
ed exclusively. And then Jack had so much to

tell about himself, his success as a lecturer and man about town generally, that he was really the only hero of the evening — Mildred's work and sacrifices looking very humble in comparison with his achievements. But Jack tore himself away at last, and then, with a satisfaction such as they alone know who have a conscience at peace with all the world, Mildred looked at her own home-circle.

"Do you know, this must be something like the home-coming to the heavenly places when all our loved ones are safely gathered there."

"Everything is Heaven with you yet, Mildred," Paul said.

"It ought to be, when she had only Indians to look forward to in this world," Grace remonstrated.

"She is done with Indians now. I guess Jack means to keep her for his missionary, by the way he watched her to-night."

"I would prefer my Indians to Jack's conversation for the rest of my life. They have the grace of silence to recommend them, if nothing else."

"When you see Douglass Everett, you will reckon your Indians are only savages. He has improved, if Jack hasn't."

"Tell me all about the Everetts," she said, with brightening face.

"They are away a great deal. Douglass studies and works as hard as if his living depended on it."

"What is he going to do?"

"He is literary; writes for the magazines and reviews. I've heard say he is smart."

"I am so glad, so glad." She spoke softly, with a thrill of joy in her voice. "Ever since that first day at school, he has seemed to belong to me in some mysterious way. I hope he will be a very great and very good man. I am certain he will be brave and noble."

"I hope you won't say all those fine things to him, Mildred. You are so unlike every one else," Paul said, anxiously. "It would be just like you; and men don't always understand some girls."

"Why, Paul, what do you mean?"

"Never mind; only promise not to say anything like that to Douglass Everett."

"You need not fear, my cautious brother. Whatever I may say to him, he will understand what I mean. To hear you talk and look at you makes me feel as if you were some other girl's brother," she said, with her arms about his neck, her lips pressed fondly to the downy cheek.

Tired nature asserted her rights and the conversation was suspended for a few hours. The next morning Mildred announced that she was going out to Grassmere.

"Won't you wait for them to call on you first?" Paul asked.

"Why, Paul, how fastidious you have grown."

"They are the leaders of fashion in these parts I guess. Anyway, they are neck and neck with the best; and it's the fashion to wait until folks call on you."

"Not very elegantly expressed. My boys would never use such slang to me."

"They talk like the dictionary, no doubt. I expect they are a precious lot of prigs."

"Oh no; they only talk like well-trained boys. I do not encourage pedantry."

Paul had no suitable reply ready, and so was compelled silently to watch Mildred put on her old-fashioned hat and start for Grassmere. He had been more successful in making friends among his schoolfellows at Park Avenue, and had therefore imbibed the prevailing spirit of the school far more deeply than she, and was forced to endure the pettiness and restrictions of a social world in which he had no foothold.

As Mildred walked along the accustomed street, which years ago had been more like a country road, the houses in many places separated by fields and gardens, she was grieved to see these green spaces mostly filled up with grand residences. Already she was beginning to miss the wideness and freedom of Dakotan solitudes. Like many another she was often tempted to wish human beings were fewer in number and of better quality. She loitered along the way after passing the gatekeeper's lodge and receiving a shy smile from the little tots who peeped at her through the roses. The eldest was a mere baby when she went away, and now there were three smiling at her. As she neared the house Paul's suggestion began to trouble her. After so long a time, and with no messages passing to and fro save what was conveyed in her mother's letters, they might not, like herself, be ready to begin an intimacy interrupted three years before. When finally she reached the marble steps on which her feet halted timidly on her first visit there, something of the old feeling took possession of her; but quickly ascending, she rang the bell. A familiar face greeted her cordially, for the servants at Grassmere remained in Mrs. Everett's em-

ploy year after year, and this maid had known Mildred from a little girl. "We did not know you were home. Mrs. Everett and Mr. Douglass will be very glad to see you," she said, heartily.

"Have you many visitors, Jane?" Mildred asked, anxiously.

"Not many. Lady Alicia Merton is here, though."

"I am only going to stay a short time. I would like to see Mrs. Everett just a few minutes alone."

Jane led the way to the library. "You are pretty sure not to be disturbed here so early in the morning."

How well Mildred remembered the great, dim room, with its huge piles of books lining shelves that reached from floor to ceiling all around the walls. It was little changed. The same luxurious furniture inviting repose of body, while the mind was luxuriating in realms of fancy or abstract thought with a favorite author, forgetting for a while mental pain and worries of life. Presently a portiere was drawn aside, and Mrs. Everett came swiftly to her side. How reassuring her greeting! "Is it really Mildred come to us again? You are wel-

come, my child," she said, saluting her on brow and lips. "Are you glad to be home again?"

"Too glad, I am afraid. It seems so pleasant."

"When did you reach home?"

"Last evening. You see I did not wait long for a glimpse of Grassmere."

"You are one of the few who do not change their friendship with the years."

"Nor with the eternities, I hope."

"The same old Mildred has come back that left us. The spirit-world still holds your thoughts. But I must tell Douglass that you are here. You will stay with us to-day."

"Jane tells me you have visitors. I dare not face Lady Alicia in a dress like this. She would take me for a female Rip Van Winkle."

"You are my guest and friend, Mildred. It is I who decide if your costume is suitable, and I am satisfied with your appearance. I will go now and fetch Douglass."

A few moments afterwards he entered with his mother. Could it be possible this bronzed, bearded man was her boyish knight and hero? He came to her with the kindness of other days in voice

and manner. "It is the same Mildred -- almost unchanged, who left us so unceremoniously without even saying good-bye; but we will forget the seeming neglect in her promptness to say How do you do?" There was a trace of the boyish voice in the tones, deeper, more musical now.

"I came out to say good-bye, but you were all away. Did not the servant tell you?"

"This is the first intimation we have had of your thoughtfulness. Not even a line to my mother."

"I am so pained that you so misjudged me all these years. And I would so gladly have written if I had thought my letters would be welcome." Her face looked very sorrowful to the eyes studying it so intently.

"My mother trusted you all the time, Mildred. She never changes to the few she takes into her heart of hearts, and you may be sure you have one of the warmest places there."

"Next to himself I believe you have the warmest. It is so good to have you back with us," Mrs. Everett said, in a way that brought the blood bounding very reassuringly to the frightened heart.

"And back for good, is it not, Mildred?" Douglass asked.

"Oh, no! I think we all understood that I was to return when my vacation was ended."

"Three years must satisfy your Indians. The painting must have its turn now. Or have you laid that on the altar of sacrifice too?"

"Not wholly. I have painted Grassmere and its master and mistress a good many times." Mildred bethought herself then of Paul's words, and wished she had not made her confession.

"You will let me drive you home this evening, and grant me a look at your studies."

"But I am going now. I should not have detained you so long from your friends," she said, turning to Mrs. Everett.

"We have no friend that gives us so much pleasure to look at just now as you."

"And the music, Mildred. We have an organist with us to-day almost as good as Von Staaden, whom you admired so much. You must stay with us,—your mother will not look for you." He touched the bell.

There was a look of appeal on Mildred's face as she turned to Mrs. Everett, and murmured, "Won't

you excuse me? It would be too hard discipline to meet your visitors."

"Nonsense, my child. Returned missionaries are not supposed to be abreast of the fashions."

"What are you talking about, mother?"

"Shall I tell him, Mildred? But men do not always sympathize with us in our little martyrdoms."

"I will go home now," she said decisively.

"You must first come to the music-room. Where is Alicia?" he questioned of his mother.

"Is Lady Alicia the organist?"

"Yes, she plays superbly now. She will be glad to have such a listener as you." He was half-way up the stairs when he turned suddenly around, looking down at his mother and Mildred, who had followed him into the hall. "You must make her take off her hat. I shall have the feeling that she will slip away from us if we are not watching." He spoke very authoritatively. "She has a faculty of doing that."

Douglass's kindly manner put her thoroughly at her ease, so she took off her hat obediently, and dropped it carelessly on a chair.

"Is it your custom to treat your millinery in

in that unceremonious fashion? I have been led to regard that portion of lady's attire with great respect."

"You need not exercise that faculty on behalf of mine, since I manufacture them myself."

"They will be greater objects of reverence than ever if I find your skilled fingers have fashioned them. I shall look upon them as poems in ribbon and lace."

She looked up at him oddly. "You did not use to tease me. Paul has told me wonderful things about you, but—" she stopped abruptly.

"You do not think his description does me justice. After we have been together a while longer, you may make discoveries yourself," he said humorously.

"You can make me feel beautifully at home here. That is an art you have not lost."

"Why, Mildred, you looked as frightened when I came into the room to see you just a moment ago, as you did years ago, when you stuck at the door the first time you came here. If I had indulged in sentiment, you would have slipped out of the house like a ghost and been half-way home by this time."

"I was very near slipping out before I was well in, when Jane told me of your company. It seems so absurd for me to be here with them."

"So it does, now that I think of it calmly. But never mind; you shall have the music." Mildred winced at his remark, and once more wished herself at home. Looking at him presently she saw a mischievous gleam in his eye.

"It is like a chapter out of romance, to be teaching Indians one week and the next hobnobbing with society people, taking the extreme of life at a bound, so to speak. No wonder you are a little self-conscious about your appearance: but we are not so particular about appearances as our school-fellows at Park Avenue used to be. But I should be grateful to them; if it had not been for their snobbishness I should never have discovered you; and but for you, Mildred, I have the impression I should not be standing here." His face was sober now, his eyes softening under a new emotion that made him look positively regal to the girl standing beside him. With a sudden introspection she wondered, with a sort of self-pity, if she would ever be so happy again as at that moment. A moment after the rustle of muslin drapery on the floor recalled

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her wandering fancies, and looking around she
saw Lady Alicia approach — a puzzled and not
over-satisfied expression on her face.

"Ah, here you are!" Douglass said, very care-
lessly, Mildred thought, when addressing such a
notable person. "We were just coming for you,
to get some music. You will remember each
other."

Lady Alicia bowed with a stately dignity quite
crushing to poor Mildred, not accustomed to the
ways of such high-bred folk.

"Shall we go directly to the music-room?
Mildred is going to give us the day, and we must
make as much of it as possible, since she is bent
on immolating herself upon savages."

"My boys and girls are not savages. They have
a tractability and gentleness I do not always find
among more highly civilized people," Mildred said,
with gentle reproof.

"I have no doubt they are marvels of intellect-
ual development, and comport themselves with the
gravity of young philosophers," Douglass said, mis-
chievously. "I shall certainly go and see you
among them, if you insist on returning."

"We will be honored by your presence."

Lady Alicia was moving leisurely towards the music-room, Mildred's eyes following her, while half-unconsciously she pictured her ladyship reduced to poverty and compelled to move with the celerity of average housewives at the dinner-hour with half a dozen hungry mouths to satisfy unaided. "She could never do it," she said to herself,—"people are not created alike, I am sure."

Her ladyship had reached the door and was looking to see why her audience still lingered.

Mildred quickened her steps; for she was getting afraid of her. She entered and sat back near the door—her mind turning with memories bitter-sweet, while the skilled fingers drew from the great organ its stored-up harmonies. She listened admiringly. Mechanically it was a fine display of skill and judicious training; but it lacked the touch that thrills, and which only a few are born with, and that no amount of training can produce any more than a Michael Angelo or Shakespeare can be made to order. Douglas watched her face and knew that she was not perfectly satisfied. He took a chair near her and whispered, "You are hard to please. I fear your Indians have made you critical."

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"You must not see in faces what may only exist in your own imagination," she murmured softly.

"I understand your face too well to be mistaken. You may as well confess to your lack of appreciation of the music."

"The execution is quite wonderful, I think," Mildred faltered.

"But lacks soul; is that it?"

"I think you are very insistent in finding out my thoughts."

"Do you remember you admired her playing long ago?"

"Yes; but when one has listened for hours at a time to nature's harmonies, it makes one difficult to satisfy. You must remember I have lived very near to nature's heart, these last years."

He turned again to the piano, while Mildred took what satisfaction she could out of the exact blending of chords and rendering of the composer's score; but he grew tired listening, and glancing now and then into Mildred's still face, he began studying her more closely than he had ever done, and wondered as he watched her sitting there in her old-fashioned gown, of material far from elegant, with the graceful pose and unconscious dig-

nity that a duchess might envy. How did she develop so beautifully away off there on the confines of civilization, with nothing but a few books and her own thoughts to uplift her? He looked at her with an intentness that at last made her ill at ease—the flush growing deeper on her cheek. At last she rose and, going to the window, drew back the curtains and stood partly concealed by its friendly shelter. He rose to follow her, for the first time in all his life realizing that standing there, in her rare sweetness and humility, was the one woman in all the world for him. He forgot the proud girl waiting for him at the other side of the room, who had waited with what patience she could command for years, and whom in a Platonic fashion he had regarded as the probable companion of his future years—forgot too the proud family to which such an alliance would admit him, with its wealth and prestige. The Lady Alicia intuitively felt that her music was falling on unheeding ears. Her jealous instincts, always on the alert where Mildred was, led her to glance around just as Douglass arose, his face turned from her; but she was none the less certain that he was watching Mildred. A break in the

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music, and then the abrupt ending of the measure startled the latter, when she turned and saw her ladyship approaching.

"You do not find Brahm's music interesting, Miss Kent?" she said coldly, and then, without waiting for reply, added: "One's musical talent, it is asserted, can be gauged by their ability to appreciate his compositions."

"I must plead guilty then to a lack of talent; for I could not tell if his music was intended to make one sad or glad."

"Ah, you are very much in the dark. That symphony was one of his most decided ones."

"Brahm's admirers claim him, if I mistake not, as the high-priest of intellectual music. But I am like Mildred. I want something human, passionate, not mere abstract intellect."

"Why, I thought he was one of your especial favorites. You used to admire that very quality in his compositions," she said, arching her brows.

"Possibly I may have changed. But we must not stand here. Time is too precious, when this is Mildred's first holiday for years. What shall it be?" He turned to her now, the glow returning to his face that Lady Alicia had banished for the

moment. "Would you like a sail on the lake? That used to be your favorite amusement. Or would you prefer looking at the new books and pictures? Anything you choose, for the day belongs to you."

"It will be one of the special days of my life, I believe." She tried to speak lightly, but her lips quivered. Douglass was making it terribly hard for her to retain her composure, with Lady Alicia looking critically on.

"It should be a bright day, when there are a thousand or more dull days for a back-ground."

"My days among my boys and girls were not dull. One may be happy in different ways. An easy conscience brings its own peculiar satisfaction." She looked at him eagerly — her eyes as suddenly falling before the expression she met on his face.

"Shall we look at the pictures first? There are some new ones I would like you to see."

"Yes, I believe I am hungering to look at a good painting. One manages to keep desires for the impossible in repression, but when they become possibilities, the longing suddenly springs to fiercer life." She turned to the door as if eager to make

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up for lost time. Lady Alicia hesitated, a flush, certainly not of pleasure, rising to her face. She did not care to leave Douglass and Mildred alone. Her pride forbade her meekly trailing through the house after them. As she hesitated at the door, to her great relief Mrs. Everett joined them, when she felt safe to retire with the dignity the occasion demanded. To her chagrin Douglass paid no attention to her while he stood beside Mildred, who had paused to listen to something Mrs. Everett was saying. The whole length of the long hall lay between them when Lady Alicia turned at last to look at them again. Douglass was still looking at Mildred, as if he expected to see her suddenly vanish from his sight. A moment after Mrs. Everett left them and came to her. "Are you not going with them?" she asked, "or shall we join the others? I think they are all in the conservatory?"

"I am going down to the drawing-room. I want to hear Miss Kent's raptures over the pictures."

"You mistake her entirely. She takes her pleasures silently."

Her ladyship bowed coldly in response to Mrs. Everett's defence of her favorite, and then followed

the two, as she supposed, down stairs; but Douglass had, for some reason of his own, gone first to the picture-gallery. There were a few new paintings there which Mildred soon found; while many of her old favorites were hanging in their still loveliness on the walls. She stood looking at one that particularly satisfied her.

"How can you enjoy them so deeply when you have planned your life is direct variance to all they imply?" Douglass asked, "banishing yourself from everything your heart craves after."

"I am not banished from everything."

"Your mother read to me, from one of your letters, a description of your house and surroundings. It seemed the abomination of desolation to me, though you endeavored to give it a few rose-colored touches."

She quoted in reply St. Basil's words: "As the guest of God, all places are alike to me."

"You are not a father confessor, worn and world-weary, but a young girl formed to be happy—to make others supremely happy."

"How can I do that better than where I am? You would almost convince me my sacrifice has been an utter failure."

"It is a sacrifice, then, Mildred? You do care for us here, and feel the separation?"

"The whole world would not tempt me away from all I hold dearest, if there were not other worlds beyond us." She spoke vehemently, though scarce above her breath, while her face was pale even to the lips. He turned abruptly and walked the whole length of the room, standing by an open window that framed a more exquisite picture than any hanging on palace walls—Mildred, through a mist of tears, stood looking up, scarcely conscious whether a blank space or gem of art was before her eyes. At last he came to her, speaking her name differently from what she had ever heard it pronounced before. Turning to him, she saw that he was moved by some strong emotion. "I have made a discovery this morning, Mildred. I cannot let you leave us again. I must have you here, my bride, my wife."

Her face was ashen now: "I gave myself away long ago."

"To whom?" he asked hurriedly. "You have not promised yourself to one of these missionaries, surely."

"I have given myself to God. You knew that,

Douglass." How softly she murmured his name, as if those little letters formed a sweeter symphony than Beethoven's best.

"You have fulfilled that vow. All the world would absolve you."

"If I cannot absolve myself."

"If you loved me, Mildred, you would not hesitate. But I do not think you have a heart like the rest of us,—like average human beings."

"If love gives a claim to your common humanity I cannot think any one has a stronger one than I."

"Have you ever loved any one?"

"Yes."

"May I ask who it is you love?"

"The one who was my friend so long ago, who protected me when my heart was nearly breaking." Her voice was tremulous, but she looked up at him bravely.

"Ah, no, Mildred; that is only friendship. It is not love, or you would leave all the world for me." He spoke sadly.

"I would do so willingly. I would go with you into exile, into a cabin, on the prairie, oh, so gladly, if duty and I could go with you, but

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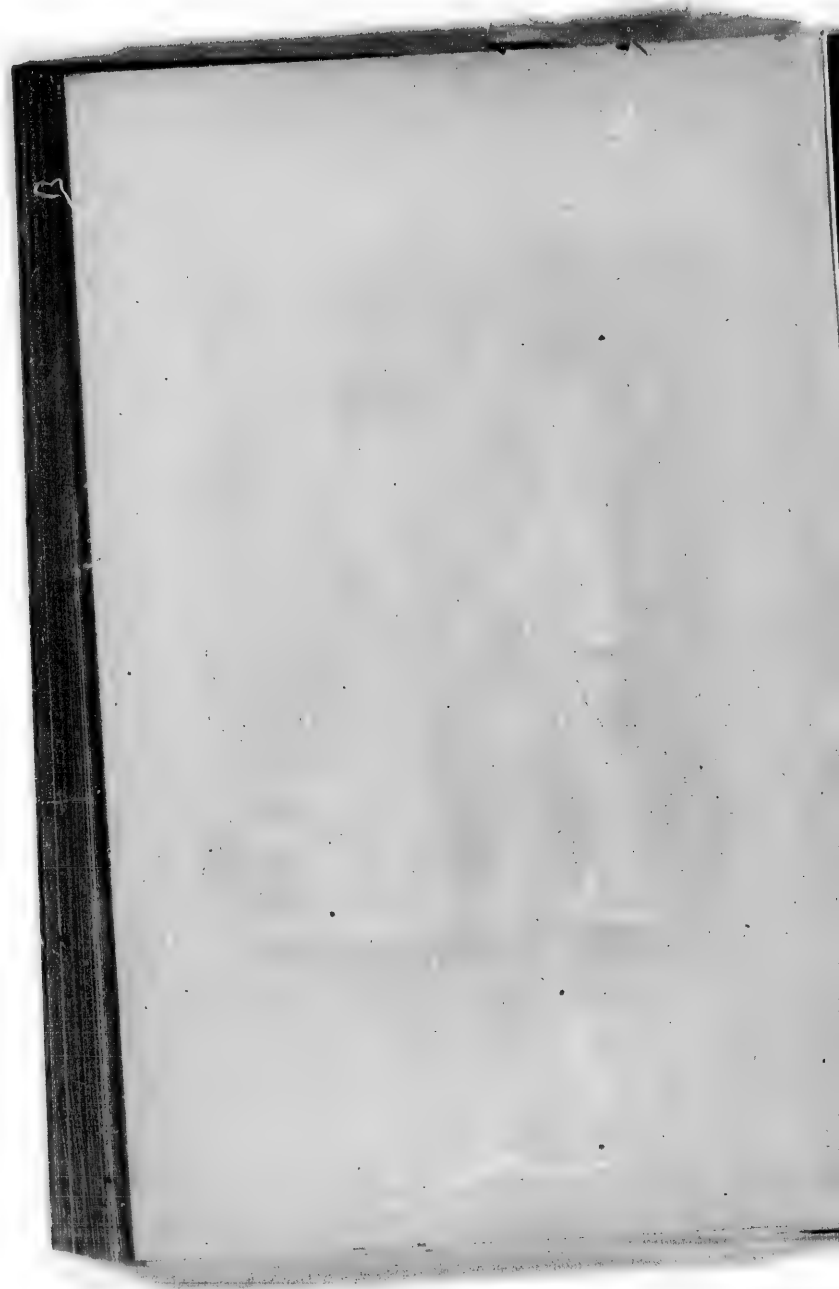
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not otherwise." She too spoke sadly, but with a firmness of resolve that was maddening to the one who watched her.

"Did you always love me—ever since we have known each other?" he asked at last.

"You were always my hero, but—" she hesitated, and then murmured, "I did not always care for you in that way."

"How long have you done so?"

The rose-tint came back, flushing neck and brow, and then after a pause she answered bravely, "Since I saw you and Lady Alicia at the Park Avenue Commencement. I knew then you were going to be married; I realized how rich she was to have your love."

"I shall never marry any one but you,—probably become a wanderer—for you and Grassmere henceforth will seem inseparable. Is your decision unalterable, Mildred?" Both face and voice pleaded more eloquently than the mere words he uttered.

"Perhaps in heaven God may let me know and love you better than any of His shining ones." Her expression at that moment might have been caught by one of the Old Masters and immortalized for a martyred saint on the eve of her bridal with Death.

"It is not then I long for you, but here, now," he said passionately.

The door opposite opened, and Lady Alicia entered. Douglass turned abruptly away and left the room, while Mildred, her self-possession utterly gone, stood helplessly awaiting her ladyship's approach.

"You seem not to have enjoyed the pictures very much, I should judge," she said, her curiosity mastering her good breeding. After a pause she asked again, "Where has Mr. Everett gone?"

"I do not know."

"Have you seen the pictures in the drawing-room yet?"

"I have not."

"It is very strange that he left without taking you there."

Mildred made no reply, while gradually the lost self-control was regained so that she was able, with outward calmness, to move from picture to picture, looking at them about as appreciatively as if they had been bits of blurred paper. Her brain was in a whirl — her heart crying out passionately, despairingly against the decision of her will.

Lady Alicia concluded finally that Douglass

must have been taken suddenly ill, and decided that they should go in search of him or his mother. Mildred turned wearily. She certainly looked ill enough to be in bed. At the door she looked back wistfully at the spot which would henceforth hold the saddest, sweetest memory for her in all life's victory.

"You admire this place exceedingly. When Mr. Everett has a family, you should become governess to his children," Lady Alicia said with a patronizing air, which was, however, quite thrown away since questions and blandishments were alike unheeded. When they reached the drawing-room, to Mildred's relief Lady Alicia left to go in search of Douglass. The door had hardly closed on her when Douglass entered and came to Mildred's shelter within an alcove on the farther side of the room. The shadow had lifted from his countenance, and with his usual cheerfulness, he said: "I won't trouble you any more to-day, my darling. After hearing your confession I feel certain everything will turn out right, and you must make up your mind to have a perfect day. Shall we go into the garden first, or will you look at the pictures?"



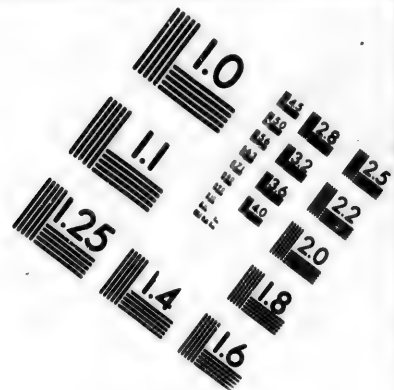
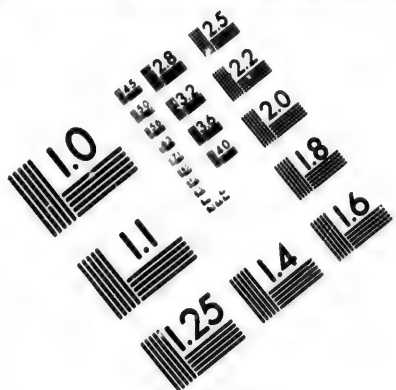
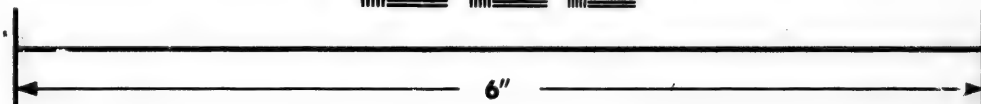
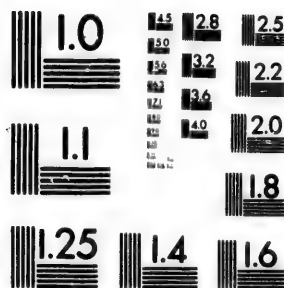


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"I had rather go into the garden."

"You would rather not have any one with us?"

She looked up with a smile,—"I will leave that for you to decide."

"As you will do everything after this, Mildred. I mean everything upon which my heart is passionately set. You need not fear that I will be exacting."

"You forget your promise."

"It is impossible not to do so while you are near me," he said sternly. He paused at the door to tie his mother's garden hat on her head. "That is very becoming to you."

Mildred was silent, but the battle between heart and will raged none the less fiercely. To her relief, as they passed out into the garden she saw Mrs. Everett and Lady Alicia approaching. The latter looked greatly surprised when she saw Douglass walking along with a very cheerful expression of countenance.

"We are doomed to interruptions." He spoke softly, but his tone was none the less very impatient. When her ladyship reached them, she said curiously: "I saw you not half an hour

ago looking the picture of distress; and now one could fancy you had some internal illumination, your face is so bright."

"May it not be your fancy, or else the sunshine which has wrought the miracle?" he said coolly.

She looked baffled, but ventured no further remark. By a little skillful manœuvering on her part she secured Douglass, and left Mildred to wander beside Mrs. Everett among the flowers. Mrs. Everett was keen enough to discover that neither her son nor Mildred were just themselves, but did not for a moment guess at the true state of affairs. The day passed drearily enough for Mildred, although they had a delicious hour on the lake, and the pictures alone would have made her supremely content for at least a month amid her Dakotan solitudes; while Mrs. Everett carried her off, in the hour before dinner when the other guests were busy in their rooms over their toilets, to the library to exhibit her son's literary productions. She only had time for a hasty glance at them; but even that was sufficient to reveal to her the fact that Paul had not exaggerated when speaking to her of his literary ability. They had

not been long in the drawing-room after dinner when Douglass came to her and said the carriage was in readiness and that he wished her to slip out quietly. "Some one will be sure to have an errand to the city if they know we are going, and we have had a surfeit of society to-day."

She did as he requested, and, on going into the hall, found the maid standing there considerably mystified, waiting, at Douglass' command, to give her her hat. She gave the directions where the carriage was in waiting and Mildred went out. The soft tints of the late twilight were gradually fading into purple and black, while the stars looked down tenderly through the unclouded ether on our little planet-ship sailing among the larger suns and systems, carrying its heavy burdens of care and woes. A weary world, and full of perplexities and limitations, it seemed to Mildred, as she sank into the seat beside the man whom she loved only less than her God. She turned her eyes towards the house standing grim and stately against the dark sky, when for the first time it flashed across her mind all this splendid place had been offered to her that day. As the horse walked slowly through the perfumed air, Douglass turned to her and said:—

"The day is done, now, Mildred, and my promise is fulfilled. I want you to tell me to-night when the hour will come that I can keep you at my side always."

"I told you this morning all I could tell you," she murmured.

"I shall not take that answer. I have thought it all over. I have thought of nothing else to-day I believe, and cannot permit two lives to be wrecked by a mere sentiment."

"If you could be a missionary, I would go with you to Greenland, or to the lepers of Molokai, to the most desolate spot on earth, and it would seem like heaven to me, if you and duty went with me." She turned to him eagerly; the friendly night concealed the smile her words provoked on his face.

"I have not been called to that work. Everyone cannot be a missionary. The poor things would soon starve if everyone gave themselves up like you."

"There is no danger of such a thing happening for some centuries," she said calmly.

"You will be guided by your mother's decision, Mildred. Won't you consent to leave it with her?"

"I will be guided by her in everything my conscience will allow. Is it right, is it manly, to torture me thus?" she cried.

"Is it torture to urge you to be my wife?"

"It is when I must refuse. Can you not understand me? If it had been a mere caprice, would I have stifled my love for art — for higher culture, for those so dear to me, and buried myself among Indians?"

"No, Mildred; I cannot understand such self-abnegation, but I can admire it, reverence it. Some day your mind may change; and I will wait for that blessed time."

"And you will not leave Grassmere. Perhaps in a few years you will forget me, and be happy, — so happy with some beautiful woman." Her voice trembled; plainly the picture she drew was tinged with her heart's blood.

"Could you blame me if I should forget?" He spoke soberly. She did not know he smiled to himself under cover of the night.

"No." Her voice sounded like an echo among graves.

"A score of years hence we may look back, — you and I, — with half a continent between us, and

with boys and girls waiting to enact these scenes over again, our well-loved partners at our side, and smile at the bitterness of to-day."

"I will never be able to smile at it, Douglass. I shall never have any husband unless God gives you to me," she said with a sob. His only reply was to clasp passionately the hand that lay on her knee. The horse walked sedately along; Douglass probably had never driven so slowly over that road before, yet when they came into the busy, lighted street, it seemed but a moment since they left Grassmere.

"I brought old Roger on purpose, for he walks so slowly now; but he has made good time to-night," he said, with surprise not unmixed with vexation.

He said good-bye at the gate.

"Jack Carver will be quite sure to be there, and probably Mr. Felton and others," Mildred explained, by way of apology for not inviting him in.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT WORK AGAIN.

DOUGLASS came and went, while her mother, with wistful face, seconded his suit, although she said very few words. Paul was mystified; for he saw the lover's longing in Douglass Everett's eyes far more plainly than in Jack Carver's, while he felt morally certain he was the one man among men according to Mildred's estimation. But he could get no satisfaction by questions or coaxing.

Her holidays were abruptly ended when scarce a fortnight had passed, by a letter very politely written, but none the less emphatic, asking her to assume charge of a school in Northern Dakota.

"Oh Mildred, this is bitter," her mother said, her habitual self-control for the moment forsaking her. "Surely, can God require such sacrifice from you — from Douglass? How can I let you go?" Mildred was silent. She never reasoned with any of them now; but the face, daily growing whiter, revealed the conflict going on in her soul. The sudden summons, in some respects, was a relief — she was glad to get back again to hard work, and away from temptation. The bitterest moment was when Douglass came to say good-bye. It was in the early morning, and she was to leave that night. It chanced to be one of those dreary days we have sometimes even in the heart of summer. The wind was from the east, with sudden gusts that drove the rain fiercely against the window-pane, while it moved like a spirit in pain. She met him at the door, dripping in his long mackintosh, his face wet with the rain he had faced from Grassmere. He threw off his wet coat and turned, without waiting for her to lead the way, into the seldom-used parlor.

"Oh do not go there," she cried, "it is too desolate."

"No place is desolate to me where you are,

Mildred. To-morrow the whole city will be that." He stood looking down at her. "I have been strangely reminded of that first day I came here. Do you remember, Mildred? We were only boy and girl then."

"I remember it and all your thousand other kindnesses. Yet how have I requited them?" She laid her head down on the table in a burst of uncontrolable weeping. It was the first time her fortitude had forsaken her in his presence. He laid his hand on her head: "Hush, Mildred, this is worse to me than all the rest," he said hoarsely. "I will not add any more to the burdens I see you have to bear. I did not think you suffered like myself. I will say good-bye now; but won't you cheer me with the promise that I may come some time to see you, and with the hope too, that God may help you to see you are making sacrifices he does not demand? Has it never occurred to you that your work might be more helpful to others as my wife, than as an obscure teacher in the wilds of Dakota?"

"Oh, yes, a hundred times; but I cannot make you understand how I feel bound by my promise, just as if I were a wedded wife, and you

sued for the hand given to another. Surely God has as good a right to expect a fulfillment of a promise as one of us; but maybe my purpose will falter. God forgive me, if I make a mistake."

"You are forcing me to worship you, Mildred, by your heroism—your superb ideal of duty."

She rose, her calmness returning by a supreme effort of will. "Our good-bye need not be final. You may join me in my work some day."

"Or, you may come to me." He stooped down and kissed her, the first lover's kiss that had ever pressed her lips; and then he turned and went out into the storm without speaking again. She packed her trunk and got everything in readiness for the cab that was to come for her at six—some hours earlier than was necessary. She was too restless to sit quietly and talk to her mother, or listen to Paul and Grace, who speculated gloomily on the improbability of seeing her before another three years had elapsed. Paul reckoned he might be well on in his college course by that time; and if she should double her term he might have the nucleus of a family about him of his own raising.

"I am not going to follow your example and

live single. Folks that get married, and do as the Lord intended, are more natural as well as sensible," he remarked, in the oracular way that the one man of a family usually falls into.

Supper was swallowed at last — a mere farce with all of them, even to Paul, who had never before missed a meal through sentiment, — and through tears more blinding than the dashing rain they said good-bye.

The cab-man looked pityingly at the sad-faced girl as he deposited her trunk on the platform and felt somehow relieved when a stalwart, fine-looking man took possession of her, and attended to the disposal of her luggage and got her ticket. It was Douglass who was waiting for her. He knew she would be too self-denying to permit herself the luxury of a parlor-car, or her regular meals in the dining-saloon; he decided to attend to these secondary matters himself. He would fain have accompanied her, but dared not make the request.

The whistle blew, and, after a long hand-clasp, he left her to pass out into the darkness and storm, to meet they knew not when, if ever, and with the possibility of entirely changed relations should they look into each other's eyes again, for few hu-

man beings are true-hearted enough to hold, through uncertainty and the lapse of years, one absorbing passion. Perhaps most of us could count such persons who have crossed our pathway on the fingers of one hand.

That journey to the West lacked the keen delight of the other she had taken only a fortnight before, but it was not without its consolations. The consciousness that she had conquered self, and at the loss of what was dearest on earth, had stood firm against temptation, brought its reward. Whether the sacrifice was wise or no, must be decided by each according to his light; but that she deemed it so and was true, proved that she was fashioned something like the martyrs of our holy religion.

The journey ended, she found her new home more desolate than the first. The school had been only a short time established, and her pupils were veritable little savages. The teacher placed in charge had given up in despair, leaving the assistant to manage them alone until another could be secured. The house was a typical frontier abode, with few of the appliances that transform wood and mortar into a genuine home. The children stared at her out of curious black eyes, taking in her person-

ality little more intelligently than so many well-trained animals. The teacher came out to meet her—a rosy-faced, bright-looking person, well on in her thirties—whose every gesture betokened the practical, keen-witted business-woman, as devoid of sentiment or the higher types of enthusiasm as a marble statue, but who could estimate the dollar's worth with perfect accuracy. She led the way through the group of dusky faces to the room appointed for the principal of the school.

"I tried to fix it up for you, but it looks bare enough at the best," she said, throwing open the door; and truly her words described its interior. A bed, a single wooden chair, yellow linen blinds at the windows, and an unpainted washstand; not even a strip of carpet to relieve the coldness of the dingy floor.

"I am surprised so good-looking a girl as you are should come here. Pretty girls can generally get their pick and choice of a home without burying themselves alive," was the next startling remark.

Mildred looked her surprise at the words. "Do you not work here for something better than a home or money?" she asked.

"I teach in an Indian school because the pay

is good and the work not so difficult as among white children. I wouldn't stay here alone with them from a sense of duty, I assure you. Miss Marks left because she got discouraged over their wickedness and stupidity. I told her we did not create them; and if they were a failure, it was not our fault. But she was a high-strung, hysterical creature, with fine notions of duty and self-sacrifice. They are the kind that break down easily, I find," she added, self-complacently.

"Yes, and they are the kind too that move the world," Mildred said, quite as calmly.

"Oh, well, it takes all kinds to complete the circle, and if I had been one of the shrieky kind, you would not have found a school here. I have kept every one of them, and we have had lessons right along too; but I must go and see about your dinner. Those Indian girls are better at eating the food than preparing it."

Mildred saw the door shut behind her loquacious assistant with relief, and then exchanged her travel-stained garments, putting on a pretty cambric gown,—one of many gifts from Mrs. Everett during her visit home. She resolved to be as particular about her toilet as if her pupils had been of

the same discerning class as those who attended the Park Avenue School. The dinner she found awaiting her was very indifferently prepared. The bread was dry and sour, the potatoes soaked with careless boiling, and the meat dried up, instead of roasted. While she tried to swallow something to support nature until her own hands could provide better, she felt grateful for her mother's wise teaching which had included a thorough knowledge of plain cooking.

"The victuals are very poor," Miss Brand explained, "and the girls won't take any pains; as for me, I have never taken to cooking, and I can't teach them. Poor Miss Marks was as ignorant as the rest of us; and from your looks I don't expect you know much about kitchen work."

"It is not always safe to judge from appearances," Mildred said good humoredly, as she hopelessly moved from the table, unable to force any more nourishment into her unwilling lips.

"I have tried the cook-books lately, and some of the messes have been dreadful. Even the Indians drew the line at some of the dishes I've prepared. I believe printed directions are not to be relied on always: there is almost sure to be a

missing link," Miss Brand said, with a laugh at her own expense.

"A little practical knowledge is a help even with the most accurate recipes. Between us we may do better after this. Shall we begin now? As we are at present constituted, wholesome food for the body is even more necessary than mental food."

"I gave the scholars a holiday, and sent them off to their games, except the older girls who help in the kitchen, thinking you would want to rest and have the house quiet after your journey."

"You are very thoughtful, but I shall get all the rest I need superintending some cooking operations. I would soon starve on that diet."

They set to work in good earnest—the Indian girls dividing their admiring glances between the new teacher's beautiful appearance and deft handiwork. An appetizing odor soon pervaded the kitchen, while huge batches of bread were beginning to rise hopefully in the kneading trays, watched over carefully by Mildred, who regarded bread just now as her main staff of life. Water was meanwhile heated, and relays of girls set to cleansing closets and floors, and the house generally.

"One feels so much better satisfied," Mildred said apologetically to Miss Brand, "when the house one lives in is perfectly clean."

Miss Brand smiled grimly. Such goings on were a new phase of mission-work in her experience. She had only taught under Miss Marks, and that lady's ideal of activity was of the purely intellectual kind, — the mechanical tasks in life holding in her estimation a very secondary place. At sunset, when the boys and girls were assembled for prayers, Mildred looked in the well-washed faces, and then at the clean room, as she took her place at the cabinet organ to lead the singing, and was surprised at the sudden content that had taken possession of her heart.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN EXTREMIS.

WELL-COOKED food, a well-ordered home, and a firm, steady hand, soon reduced the refractory school to submission. For the first few weeks, however, Mildred was kept so busy she could scarcely snatch time for a hurried letter home, or a moment's indulgence for her favorite pursuits; but there was rest — forgetfulness in this ceaseless activity that brought a healthy glow to the white face, and a more peaceful look out of the troubled eyes.

The early frosts soon foreshadowed the bitter winter that was stealthily approaching. With no stronger arm than her own to lean on, Mildred naturally dreaded the cold and storms; but she fortified

herself with the assurance that she would only have to confront one day at a time, though in some of the terrific blizzards, there might be a score of average eastern storms piled into one.

Miss Brand's descriptions of the hardships of the previous winter were somewhat terrifying. The house, she said, was a mere shell; and after a heavy snow-storm the sleighing indoors was better than out, for the very good reason that the drifts were not so deep. Mildred set the larger boys to work in the early autumn piling earth around the house, quite up to the windows, to exclude the frost, while the winter's fuel and other stores were laid away in sufficient quantities to last until the April skies would be melting tenderly above them. The lads entered heartily into her plans; for there was usually some special treat at the close of a hard day's work; while study for that evening was omitted, and the time spent in story-telling, with music and games. Martha Brand used to declare those evenings were as pleasant as the parties she used to attend, long ago, in her native village in Vermont. But with all the stirring activities that each day brought, there were moments of heart-loneliness that these were powerless to com-

fort, when the question, ever unanswered, if the way Mildred had chosen was the one God meant for her, would present itself. Like a throbbing pain that no remedy can reach, the perplexing thought kept repeating itself: Was it required of her to stifle the craving for a fuller knowledge of art, for a higher culture, and more than this, the one supreme passion of her life, and live amid the wilds of Dakota, a death in life so far as what she craved most of earthly good was concerned? But she held steadily to duty as she read its page, hoping some time to find her life had not been marred by her own blindness, as to what truly was God's purposes toward her.

The days grew shorter. Christmas came and went, which she worked hard to make very joyous to the children, who were now dimly comprehending the meaning of the Christmas celebrations. After that they settled down to the uphill task of nurturing mind and body, through the storms and cold—a very difficult thing to do; for the frost had so many crannies at which to freely enter, that the school-children found it nearly as much as they could do to keep their bodies from suffering, without paying much attention to their mental outfitting.

Martha Brand was scarcely the person out of whom a first-class missionary could be manufactured, but she kept cheerful and content. She was very well satisfied with her salary, which was chiefly what she was working for; and so she got her pay as she went along, without looking forward to death, and the remote rewards of an after-life for any further recompense.

Her life had been singularly free from romance, the increasing from year to year of her savings had, thus far, been her most exciting and fascinating experience. Her present situation, taken as a whole, presented the best opportunities to further this; hence she was satisfied with her environments.

The cold was steadily increasing now, the one mitigating element in its exceeding bitterness being that it could scarcely get more intense, since the dead of winter had fully come, and the sun had turned on its long backward journey towards the summer solstice. Mildred's courage was just beginning to revive, while she fancied the worst experience of that year had passed away, when one after another of the children were taken suddenly ill — the symptoms in each case being exactly sim-

ilar. She applied the simple remedies with which the medicine chest was supplied for colds and the usual ailments of the young, but found them unavailing. In her extremity she despatched one of the few well lads after the nearest physician, who lived some six or seven miles away. He came, and as Mildred accompanied him from cot to cot in the long, chilly dormitory, his face became very grave. She asked at last what was wrong. His reply was very brief, "Measles." She shuddered, knowing so well what that meant for her dark-skinned boys and girls. A stove was set up in both the boys' and girls' dormitories, and blazing fires kept burning, while the doctor staid with them all night; and it chanced to be one of the severest of the the season. As the wind howled, and the storm raged wildly, Mildred could not help smiling at herself for feeling so safe amid the fury of the elements from the mere fact of havin strong man in the house. The doctor left her in the early dawn with the promise to return as soon as possible, and carrying with him a telegram to the nearest mission-station where help would be likely to be available, begging for help. But it was two days before he returned,

other duties imperatively demanding his presence. When he entered the house three rigid forms confronted him, while still others were struggling in the death agony. Mildred's face, as she met him at the door of the girls' dormitory, startled him with its look of misery. "They are all going to die, I believe," she murmured hopelessly. "I am afraid diphtheria has set in; their throats are white and very sore."

"What remedies are you using?" the doctor asked, more to turn her thoughts into another channel than with the expectation that she had been grappling with the terrible disease herself.

"I have been burning brimstone and blowing sulphur into their throats, and with the larger ones used a gargle very frequently, and I give brandy and beef tea in as large quantities as I can force upon them. I have been afraid of making drunkards of my boys, in case they get over this," she said with a pitiful smile.

"Do you find Miss Brand a good nurse?"

"She has not been in the rooms with the sick since the evening after you were here. She is afraid of the diphtheria."

"How do they get on while you are sleeping?"

standing his presence. Three rigid forms were struggling in the arms she met him at the door. He startled him with its all going to die, I believe. "I am afraid the throats are white and

using?" the doctor went into another chamber that she had been diseased herself.

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and a good nurse?" the rooms with the sick were here. She is afraid while you are sleeping?"

"I am not conscious of having slept since you left; but they have died in spite of all my care," she moaned bitterly.

The doctor turned and examined the throat of the nearest girl.

"It is one of the worst types of diphtheria. Are you not afraid?" he whispered, so that the children could not hear.

"Yes."

"What will you do, — leave here at once?"

"Not unless death releases me until competent nurses come," she said with grieved surprise that he should judge her so lightly.

"If I assure you that by remaining in this putrid air in your present exhausted state, your life is almost sure to be the forfeit — what then?"

"If you will stay to-night I will gladly rest and sleep; but I shall certainly not leave these frightened, suffering children to meet death alone." She spoke calmly, the weary, sad face turned pitifully towards a little child struggling in the agony of death by suffocation.

"Then I shall most assuredly remain. Go and tell Miss Brand to warm your bed and get a hot fire started in your room, — or stay, I will give my

own orders," he added grimly — "without doubt you would execute them yourself. Besides, I must see to getting these dead buried. I shall be forced to leave you here a little longer."

Mildred went to the poor little creature's side who was stretching out pitiful hands for her teacher's sympathy and help. It was an hour before the doctor returned. The struggle was ended then, and another little life had begun its immortal history.

When Mildred entered her own room, its delicious warmth and purity made it seem next thing to home. Miss Brand was there, bustling about very cheerfully. She was doing her best here to atone for short-comings elsewhere. Mildred glanced at the pictures on the wall — Grassmere and its master, her own mother's portrait, and all the other beloved ones — while tears filled her eyes as she thought ; When would she greet them all again, if ever, on these earthly shores ?

She had not written to her mother since the sickness broke out because of the anxiety such tidings would bring. Already they would be wondering at her silence. Martha Brand was watching her. "You should write to your mother and let her

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be prepared in case of the worst," she said
bluntly.

"We all leave many things undone that we
should do."

"I know that; but 'twould be a dreadful shock
for them to hear from strangers that you were
dead, and they not knowing that you were even
sick."

"I am not sick, only dreadfully tired," was
the weary response.

"I know that, and if you'll get right into bed
I'll bring you a bowl of hot brandy and water.
The doctor ordered me to give it to you. He
says one poison kills another; and brandy is one
of the best poisons for diphtheria."

"I have not got the diphtheria," Mildred said,
looking slightly alarmed.

"Maybe not; but he says your system must
be impregnated with it to some extent after you
have been in that dreadful atmosphere so long."

"I will take my poison directly then," Mildred
said with a smile. Her companion left the room
to prepare it, when Mildred knelt at her bedside,
finding in prayer the consolation only God can
give. When Martha Brand returned with her

medicine, she found her patient looking white and very weary, but with countenance as untroubled as a child's.

"You do beat anyone I ever knew for keeping up under trouble; really you look quite happy, lying there."

"How could I look otherwise while in God's keeping?" She spoke softly, and more to herself than to her companion.

"Your religion is different from most people's. It seems really to do you good. There is more difference in religion than anything I know of."

Mildred drank her medicine, and turning on her pillow, was sound asleep before Miss Brand had left the room.

She awakened with a start and looked up. The room was flooded with sunshine, and Martha Brand still at her bedside.

"I believe I have been asleep," she said with a bewildered look.

"I reckon you have, for about fifteen hours—the longest nap I ever watched over before in my life."

"Is it another day?"

"Yes, and well on to dinner-time. I was getting

uneasy about you; and besides, the doctor wants to leave; and those poor little Indians are dying off like so many sick chickens. He says they mustn't be left alone any longer than can be possibly helped."

"I will be there directly," Mildred said, rising so hastily that she turned dizzy and faint.

"Dear me! if you get sick what will become of us all?" her companion said dolefully.

"The Lord will provide."

"Maybe so. Any way, its high time provision was made from some quarter. I've written to your mother, and a dismal letter I made of it; for just as I was beginning it, late last night, the doctor came in and said two more were dead."

"I believe you meant it kindly, but I am very sorry that you wrote, my mother will be in such distress."

"They will be prepared for 'most anything after they get my letter, and worse news won't come so hard on them," was the reply, very cheerfully given.

"You are incorrigible," Mildred murmured, and then ceased the argument; while she rapidly completed her toilet and hastened to the doctor's

relief, meanwhile very anxious to know which ones of her charge had escaped to the higher school during the night. He sent her back directly to the kitchen for the breakfast Martha Brand had taken special pains to make palatable. When it was eaten, she was again left alone with the sick and dying.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

HELP AT LAST.

ANOTHER sad day and night for Mildred and her sick ones passed slowly away, and when the doctor came the following day, he found five more still forms among his little patients. Martha Brand, who ventured no farther now in the stricken house than the dining-room, beckoned him in by the back way. Her usually contented face was getting haggard and terror-stricken. She told him how busy death had been there in his absence, and then with more cheerfulness added: "One good thing, Miss Kent will be able to lay back soon, and rest, even if they don't send nurses, for they'll all be dead."

"Are none of them convalescent yet?" the doctor asked.

"Well, yes; she did call to me through the door this morning that she thought four of them were out of danger now."

"Why did she talk through the door?"

"Well, you see, I am getting scared of her, — one can't be too careful where one's life is concerned, its all we have, and those children are nothing to me, now are they?"

Thus appealed to, the doctor said shortly, "It seems not." He left directly, after giving orders to have Mildred's room warmed at once, as he intended remaining in order to give her some rest.

When the hour came just at night-fall to waken her, his heart smote him; for she was sleeping so soundly, he had difficulty in arousing her.

He spoke encouragingly when she joined him in the girl's dormitory.

"There will certainly be nurses here by to-morrow," he said, "I sent a telegram again yesterday more peremptory than the first."

"I am not sure that I can endure the strain more than another night. My brain feels strangely," Mildred replied.

"Your throat is not sore?" he asked anxiously.

"There is nothing wrong with me but loss of sleep, and the strain of overwork and anxiety. You cannot imagine how dreadful it is for me to be alone with the dying. I never realized what death was until the last few days." She shuddered.

"It is bitter leaving you here alone. But if I stay another life may be sacrificed. What do you advise?"

"One must do their duty at whatever cost." There was a quiver of pain about the lips that still spoke bravely, but he could not know how she longed to have him remain through the night.

"If I had not given my promise I should run the risk and stay. It seems as much my duty to be here as anywhere." He stood irresolute.

"Is it a little child whose life is in danger?"

"No, a woman's—a mother's."

"That decides,—her necessity is greater than mine."

"Thank you!" The doctor said no more, but left abruptly.

The night was intensely cold, to keep the fires

burning would have alone given sufficient exercise to an average woman; but in addition was the constant attention that the very sick require, all to be performed by two tired hands. When the morning broke and the sun shone brightly across the still, white prairies, she tried to face the tasks of another day, but her strength was so wasted that she realized if help were not soon sent, the sick must suffer for the care she could no longer give. The two largest boys in the school, and the most difficult to control, she believed were rapidly approaching the chill river. Very silently they had borne their pain, and with stolid faces listened to her words as she had urged them to seek the Lord. She felt an anxiety for these lads such as she had not experienced for the others whom she believed were either too young to be accountable for their sins, or who had given her comforting evidence before they died that they were ready for the great change. Every spare moment was devoted to them. Their cots stood side by side, and she could converse with them together. Towards evening as she was pleading with them, one of the lads murmured. "What are you crying for?"

"For grief to think you must so soon die and cannot enter heaven."

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"I would go there if I could; I don't want to go to hell." His face worked convulsively. She opened her Bible and read the story of the thief on Calvary who in his hour of mortal agony asked for a place in Paradise, and his prayer was granted; then with a few words of entreaty and counsel she turned to still further promises to sinners such as they, ending with that most gracious promise of all, — "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"I have been praying for a good while, but I don't seem to feel any difference," he murmured huskily; "long before I got sick."

"So have I." the other lad said, with equal earnestness.

"I believe if you will tell God out aloud just what you want, He will answer your prayer. You have been ashamed to let us know you were seeking Him; and He does not hear such prayers."

The hoarse muffled voice was raised as clearly as disease and wasted strength would permit, asking for pardon and a place with God in heaven," while Mildred on her knees at his bedside softly

sobbed her gratitude to her Father in heaven for answering her prayers.

"Teacher, I do believe the Lord hears my prayer, and that he will take me to be with Him right away. Remember, I shall be watching for you, if it is years and years before you get there. I won't forget, never, never." His voice died to a mere whisper but his face was radiant.

"I shall remember to look for you among the green fields and beside the still waters of the blessed country when God takes me there. How glad we shall be then that we learned of Christ here and learned also to love him!" She stroked the hair back from the cold, damp brow whereon the seal of death was settling.

"You will be glad that you gave up your happy home to come to us poor Indians and teach us of heaven." He smiled faintly up at her as she stood looking down at him with dewy eyes. A restless movement of the lad in the other cot arrested her attention. She turned; his face was working convulsively, but death was too near him to permit of tears. "Won't you also look to Christ? You too must soon start on that long journey, and Christ, the Lord Jesus, is here with us, waiting to make

you his child." She spoke with an eagerness only those can understand who have stood by a soul unsaved in the moment of death.

"Won't you pray for me?" He turned his eyes imploringly to Mildred.

When her prayer was ended, he added a few broken petitions of his own, a glad light shining through his eyes as she arose and looked down at him. "I don't think Peter will have to go alone to that lovely place. I shall be with him," the poor, trembling lips murmured. "How good you have been to us! But the Lord, I think, loves me more even than you do; how I want to see Him and thank Him! I wish I'd found it out before. I might have helped you so much; but now it is too late."

"Never mind," Peter whispered, "there will be time by-and-by to show how much we love her—in the green fields," he murmured drowsily, for death was fast settling down upon him. He passed away first; afterward his companion followed him peacefully, under the guidance possibly of some splendid seraph who, no doubt, bore the untutored spirit of the Indian lad with equal delight as if it had been the Queen of England, passing on to re-

ceive a richer crown than was ever seen on these earthly shores.

The darkness fell, and still no help had come, while with a feeling akin to terror, Mildred faced the labors and loneliness of another night.

Sleep was fast overpowering her. While she lingered beside a cot to administer medicine or nourishment, she would fall asleep; and the fear grew upon her that as the night wore on, and sleep became more overpowering, she would be utterly overcome, and the sick left without fire or care. But at nine o'clock the jingle of sleigh-bells greeted her. No strain of music that ever fell on her ear had such welcome harmony as that common-place string of bells jingling in the frosty air. She went to the door, but Martha Brand was before her. She saw her conducting two ladies through the drifted snow to the warmth of the kitchen fire. Mildred returned to her charge, meanwhile repressing a very natural desire to join the new arrivals in the kitchen and assist in getting them refreshments. Their tea-drinking occupied but a short time, and then they came to her, kindly, helpful women, with a world of sympathy as they looked at the face of the brave girl who had stood at her post with such self-sacrifice.

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HELP AT LAST.

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She took them from cot to cot, explaining the requirements of each child, although her eyelids drooped heavily and her limbs almost refused to obey the behests of her resolute will, until every direction was given, when, with a glad good-night, she went to her room. Such a sleep—sound, dreamless, as she had that night, would surely knit up many a “ravelled edge” of care and weariness.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WELCOME NEWS.

MARTHA BRAND'S letter reached its destination too late in the evening for Mrs. Kent to do anything in the matter but lie awake through the silence of the long night and think about her child, and the danger to which she was exposed, — her only relief the repeated committing of her care to God. At day-dawn she started for Grassmere. Instinctively she turned to Douglass Everett, knowing that her trouble would also be his. She found the long walk after her sleepless night wearying; but the air was invigorating, while the beauty of a bright morning even in the city, with the sun coming up from his azure bed and casting his rosy beams on cloud form, or

S letter reached its destination in the evening for Mrs. something in the matter but none of the long night and the danger to which only relief the repeated God. At day-dawn she instinctively she turned to g that her trouble would the long walk after her but the air was invigorating of a bright morning even coming up from his azure beams on cloud form, or

hill and valley, or projecting long shadows of trees and houses across the path, had more of comfort for her than the faces of average acquaintances. When she reached Grassmere she rang the bell timidly, only just recollecting that probably both Mrs. Everett and Douglass might be still fast asleep. She had only a few seconds to be troubled on the subject, for the door was thrown open and Douglass himself stood before her: "I saw you coming. Have you bad news for me?"

She gave him the letter, and then sank into an easy chair that stood near the door—her heart somehow comforted by the look of pain on his face. He crushed the letter in his hand, as he turned to her, saying: "I shall start for Dakota immediately. Will you give me authority to bring Mildred home with me?"

"Yes, it is time some one interfered, if she is to be saved from martyrdom," Mrs. Kent said, with a catching of the breath. The fear was growing upon her that they might already be too late.

"Will you come to the library and write her a few lines while I am getting ready?" he asked. "My mother has not yet come down stairs."

She arose and followed him silently. He hastily

provided writing materials and then left. When he returned, a half-hour later, the letter was written and sealed.

"It is well you came so early," he said. "With a little haste I can catch the train, thereby saving several hours on my journey. The carriage is waiting; if you come with me, it will take you home after I get to the station."

They entered the carriage, when the horses were driven at their utmost speed, barely reaching the station in time for him to jump on board the moving train. The carriage was turned, and the steaming horses were driven slowly towards Mulberry Street.

How tediously after that the hours crept into days, while they waited for tidings! And then the news came of a heavy storm with huge blockades of snow on the Western railways. What if Mildred was there sick, suffering with cold, and perhaps hunger? The anxiety grew almost unbearable, and then the yellow envelope came with its welcome message. It read, — "Mildred bears the journey well. Expect to reach home by to-morrow evening." Mrs. Kent read the words over and over, while tears of thankfulness dropped unheeded;

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and then she arose with a very glad heart, and began the preparations for Mildred's home-coming. Paul looked on with a mixture of approval and surprise, but at last he remonstrated over the lavish outlay.

"If Mildred was returning from a starvation trip in search of the North Pole, she could't begin to eat her share of all these good things."

"I can't help doing it, besides, there are plenty to enjoy what she leaves. I want my mission-class to share in our rejoicings."

"That will do very well; but as for Mildred, if she has Douglass at her side, she will be willing to give her share of the dainties to any one that wants them."

His mother smiled a little sadly. "Was Paul's conjecture correct, or was Mildred so unlike woman-kind in general that her heart had only room for duty and God? If so, was there cause for regret? For what is grander for any soul than entire consecration to the Infinite and Eternal?" Still there was the natural longing to have this strong-souled girl near, to rest on in hours of weakness, to comfort in the pain that soon or late is the inevitable lot of all.

"Do you think Mildred will be so insane as to refuse Douglass Everett the second time?" Paul asked impatiently.

"It is impossible to conjecture what Mildred will do. She is not like the rest of us," was the reply that but poorly satisfied the lad.

"I doubt if there are a dozen girls on this continent like her. It seems a pity she hadn't happened along in the days when men enjoyed feeding young girls to the lions, because they had inconvenient consciences. Mildred would rather have enjoyed being crunched, since it would have taken her all the sooner to the heaven where her heart seems to be most of the time." Paul spoke with considerable bitterness. He had got the share of worldliness that by right belonged to Mildred, so that neither of their characters possessed the comfortable degree of equilibrium that makes life quite enjoyable. His mother was silent, while he stood at the window idly watching the fast-falling snow, and hoping that it might not block the western roads that Mildred was then crossing.

"The Bible is on the stand beside you. Will you open it to the twelfth chapter of John's Gospel, and read the twenty-fifth verse? It has been haunting me for days."

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Paul complied with his mother's request, and
read, a little solemnly, the words: " 'He that
loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his
life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.'
It means soul as well as life," he said eagerly.

"Mildred comprehends its true meaning, my son.
I am not sure if she is not wiser than any of
us."

"You won't encourage her in the belief?" Paul
asked anxiously.

"No; but I shall ask God to direct her."

Paul sighed heavily. It seemed to him a foolish
thing to be living in one world, and yet to such
an extreme degree to partake of the spirit of an-
other world diametrically opposed to it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE END.

THE morning sun was shining brilliantly across the snowy waste, although the cold in Mildred's room was so intense that the windows were closely curtained by frost nearly a quarter of an inch deep.

Martha Brand looked in cautiously, and with a certain judicious fear, as if the plague devastating their school had actually assumed visible form and might be lurking there. The regular breathing of the peaceful but exhausted sleeper was reassuring, however, so she stepped boldly in and lifting the heavy masses of hair from the white brow, spoke several times before she received a reply. The blue eyes opened at last in a mystified way;

but the look of recognition quickly came into them, followed as suddenly by one of anxiety. "Do the children need me?" she asked, with alarm.

"Oh no, but there's a young man down stairs as impatient to see you as I've seen any one this many a day."

"Who is it?"

"Well, he's kind of stern like, and I didn't ask him his name; but he's going to take you right away as soon as we can get his breakfast. He says your mother has sent for you."

"It must be my brother Paul," Mildred said, as she proceeded hurriedly with her toilet, while she shivered with the cold.

"Brothers as a rule don't seem so impatient to see their sisters, and so masterful about them; but I guess you are a queer family anyway," Martha Brand said dryly, while she rendered what assistance was in her power. "I'd have made a fire before I called you; but that young man was in such a hurry to see for himself that you were alive and well, I hadn't the heart to keep him waiting. He's very good-looking, but I'm not surprised at that, for good looks run in some families the same as consumption."

"Paul must have changed very much since last summer, if he is very good-looking now," Mildred remarked, with some surprise.

"Maybe its the contrast, for the men folks we see here are mostly an ordinary-looking set. Now don't wait to say your prayers. It's cold enough here to give you your death, and there's no need of making a martyr of yourself. The Lord wouldn't enjoy listening to you in this room, I'm certain."

Mildred smiled at her companion's odd way of speaking about the Lord, while a very comfortable feeling crept into her heart, in spite of the cold, at finding herself once more cared for.

"I'll go right down and see about the breakfast. There's a man with your brother that drove him from the station. We must get some breakfast for them; but, dear me! there's not a decent thing in the house for them to eat. If you'd come to the kitchen after you've let him take a look at you, and give me a hand. You've such luck with light-biscuits and beef-steak."

"I will be there in a few minutes."

Martha Brand left the room looking much relieved, and Mildred went down stairs. Opening the door softly she saw standing by the farthest

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window, with his back to her, a stalwart figure in
no-wise answering to the boyish proportions of her
brother Paul.

The creaking of the door, as she closed it behind
her, caused him to turn suddenly. The face that
had been clouded and anxious swiftly brightened
as he saw her standing there, chilled with the
cold, weary, and pale, but nevertheless looking
much more like living than he had dared to hope
for.

"Thank God you are still alive!" he said, with
an embrace that brought the blood coursing to heart
and face. "You are to come home with me, —
here is your mother's written order."

He gave her the letter, which she held unopened
in her hand.

"I have thought it all out the last few months,"
she replied. "I can fulfil the troth I plighted to
God in my childhood in other ways than by ut-
ter self-sacrifice." Her voice faltered, while her
eyes drooped before the eager, searching gaze bent
upon her; but there was a resolute look on her
face, as if she was determined at any cost to make
her confession, no matter how it might be re-
ceived.

"Does that mean that you are ready to be my wife?"

"If you still wish for me," she said timidly. Of late the fear had been growing upon her that perhaps, when it was too late, she had found her views of duty had been mistaken. She had fortified her heart, or tried to, with the assurance that the work for her to do would still remain, that she would only be one of many passing over that upward road that leads to God and heaven with the life-long hunger for human love, and the shelter of home and its dear delights withheld.

Douglass was so long silent that her heart throbbed heavily. Was it then too late? She turned away, — her promise to Martha Brand must be fulfilled. Years afterward, she used to smile when that hour was reviewed, at the anxiety that suddenly possessed her lest the breakfast might be a failure, — the first and possibly the last she would ever prepare for the man she loved so absorbingly, so despairingly.

She had only gone a step or two when Douglass spoke. She glanced up quickly, her heart giving a sudden bound as she saw the expression of his face, the gladdest, most triumphant she had ever beheld. "Were you going to leave me, Mildred?"

"I did not know if you cared to have me stay with you," she spoke hesitatingly. "Besides I have other duties to perform."

"Do not let us speak of duty just now. It has parted us so long. Can't you think it a duty to remain at my side?"

"You will scarcely get a satisfactory breakfast if I do," she said, with a merry gleam such as he had not seen on her face for years.

"Never mind the breakfast! In the gladdest hour of my life I can accept any kind of a breakfast."

"You will find the kitchen the warmest room in the house. You may come with me and I will show you how biscuits are made and beef-steak broiled."

"You remind me now of the Mildred of long ago, only you are sweeter far than in those childish days," he said as they turned to go into the kitchen where Martha Brand was going around very much flurried and altogether consumed with curiosity. She was beginning to doubt if this unexpected presence in the house could be Mildred's brother since she had heard her say that she was older by several years than he.

"That's never your brother," she said in one of her stage-whispers as they stood together in the store-room, — a remark easily heard in the adjoining kitchen. "I never saw a brother looking at his own sister like that young man watches you. They keep those looks for other folk's sisters. We'll never see you back here, I guess. When'll the wedding be?"

Mildred emerged from the store-room in time to see a very amused look on Douglass's face.

"Your friend has anticipated a question I am very anxious to have answered. You must tell her our wedding will take place in a few days. I want to take you somewhere to find the roses you have lost here. A year spent among the picture-galleries of Europe will be none too long a vacation for you."

"It would not be if one's years were not so pitifully few; but time is too precious for loiterings, no matter how pleasant they may be," Mildred said, as she deftly moulded the biscuit that had weighed so heavily on Martha Brand's spirits. "But it will be one of the greatest pleasures of my life," she added, after a moment's reflection, "to go with you to Europe and enjoy the best things the old world has to give!"

Douglass smiled; the look on his face was one of perfect content, though he stood in a rather cold and most desolate-looking kitchen, waiting for the plainest breakfast, probably, that he had ever been asked to partake of.

The breakfast disposed of, it did not require much time for Mildred to pack her modest wardrobe and prepare for the homeward journey; and it is needless to say that the East-bound train that day bore a specially happy pair of human beings. It was a joyous greeting that awaited them both at Mulberry Street and at Grassmere; and all were pervaded by a spirit of true thankfulness to God, that Mildred had passed through her terrible ordeal unscathed, save the exhaustion from her untiring devotion to her wards.

A few days later there was a quiet wedding at Grassmere, and the happy pair immediately started on their promised European trip.

